

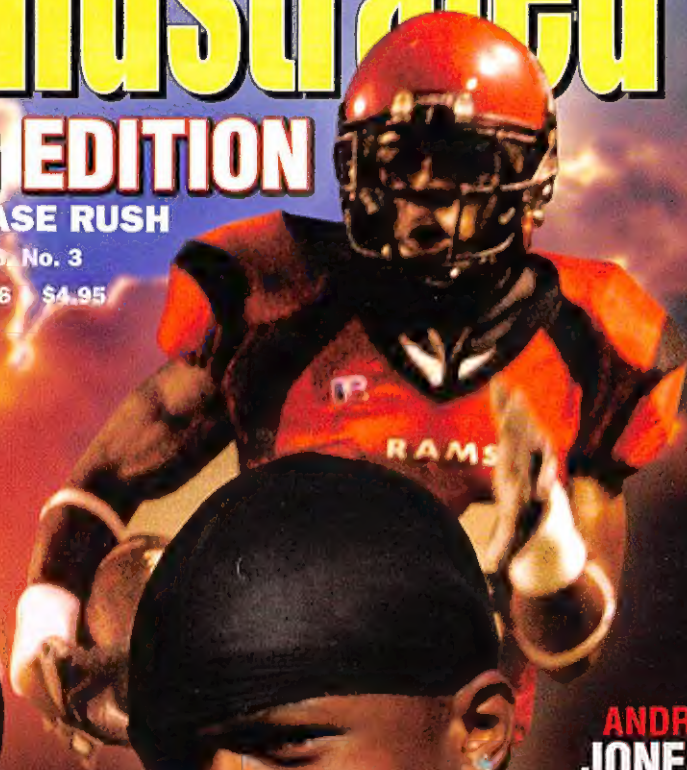
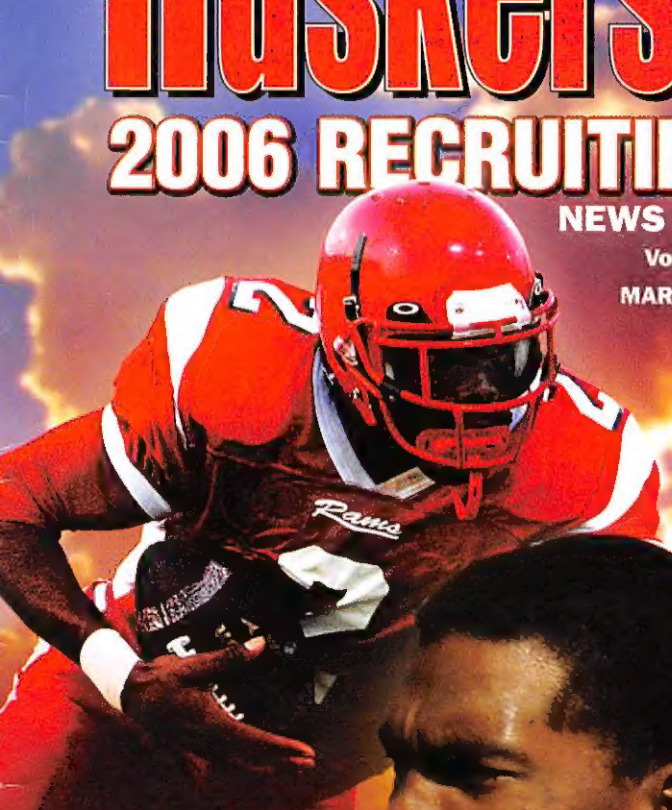
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2006 RECRUITING EDITION

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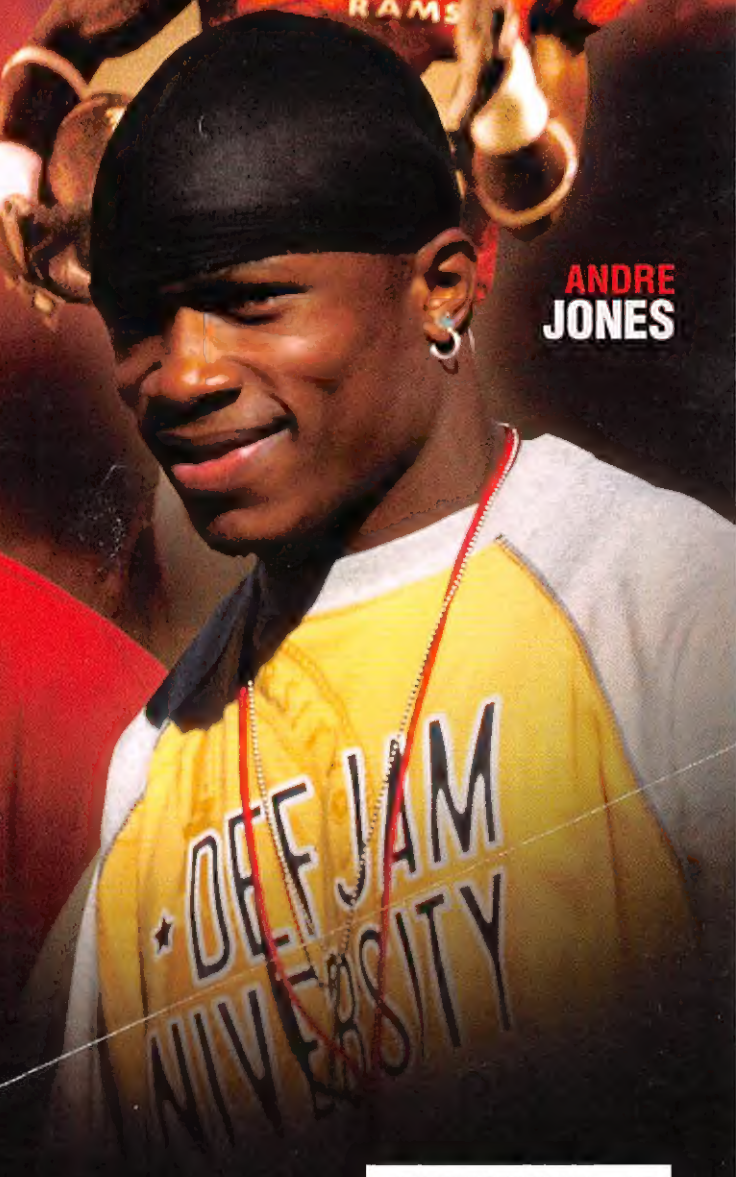
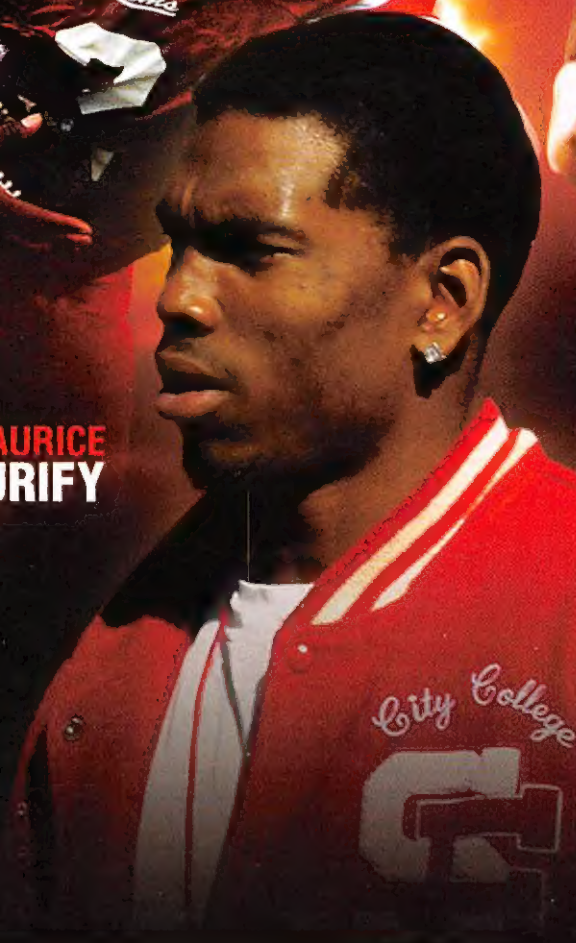
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NEBRASKA

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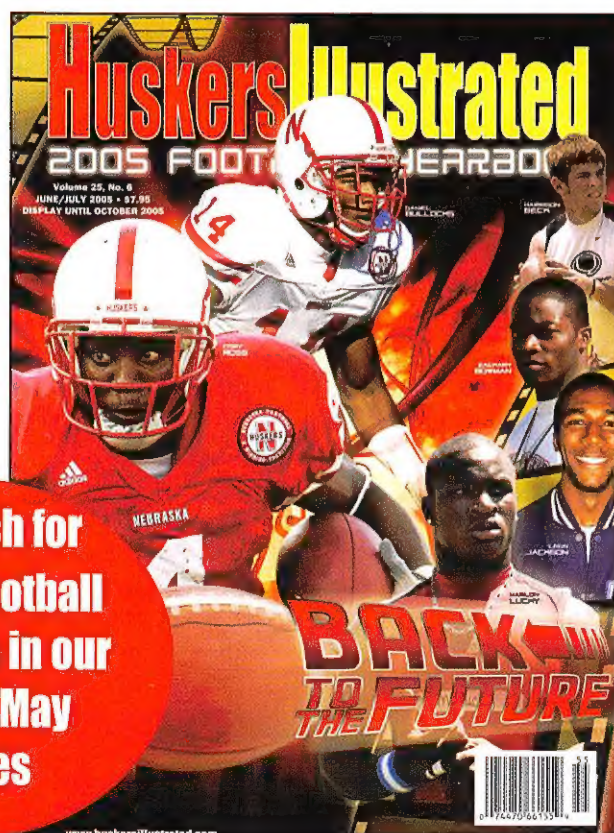
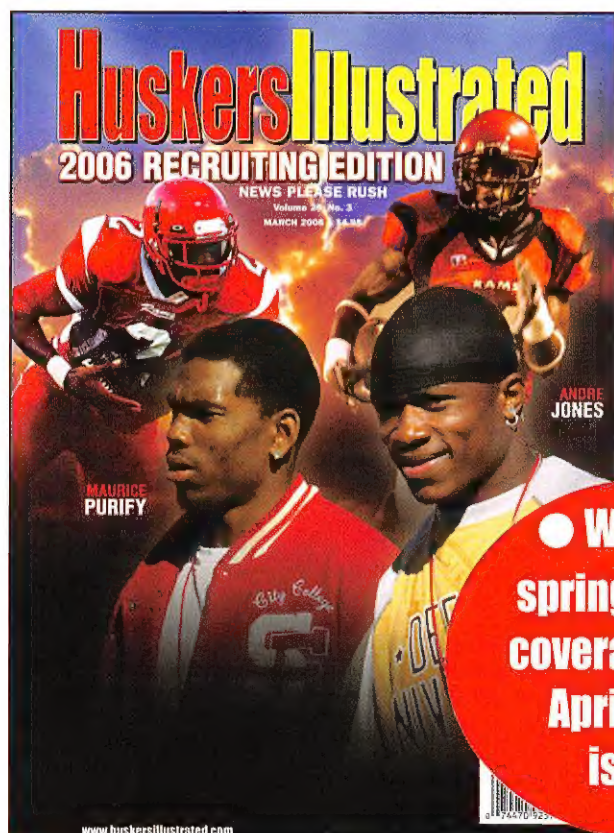
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... All The Time

Covering The Bases

*NU's newest recruiting class isn't ranked as highly,
but it does appear to fill needs*



**Brian
HILL**

RECRUITING IS an inexact science, and so is picking the players we feature on the cover of our annual recruiting edition.

Our 2003 cover featured offensive lineman Ryan Schuler, who never played a down at Nebraska because of blood clot concerns. Next to Schuler was quarterback Joe Dailey, who transferred after two seasons as a Husker.

In 2004, we featured offensive lineman Lydon Murtha and defensive back Courtney Grixby. Murtha moved into the starting lineup at the end of his redshirt freshman season, and Grixby was a full-time starter as a sophomore.

Last year, we used six players — quarterback Harrison Beck, running backs Marlon Lucky and Leon Jackson, defensive back Zackary Bowman, linebacker Phillip Dillard and defensive lineman Ndamukong Suh — from NU's consensus top-five ranked class. All six played in their first season, but Bowman was the only one

to crack the starting lineup. Obviously, quarterback Zac Taylor, kicker Jordan Congdon and defensive end Barry Turner turned out to be bigger contributors during the 2005 campaign.

While that class was ranked No. 5 by Rivals.com (behind Southern Cal, Florida State, Oklahoma and Tennessee), the recently signed Class of 2006 barely cracked the top 20. Cornerback candidate Andre Jones from Fresno City (Calif.) College is the only "five-star" recruit

(Bowman and Lucky both earned five stars a year ago) and is ranked as the No. 4 junior college prospect in the country.

Joining Jones on this year's cover is City College of San Francisco product Maurice Purify, one of five "four-star" recruits signed Feb. 1. Purify is ranked as the 17th-best junior college prospect by Rivals.com and at 6-foot-4 and 210 pounds represents the new breed of wide receiver the Huskers are seeking. Among the other new receivers are 6-5, 195-pound Will Henry of El Paso, Texas, and 6-4, 215-pound Menelik Holt of San Diego.

"We will be a big football team in the fall," coach Bill Callahan said on signing day. "We added size to this team, not only in the offensive line but at receiver and added some real quality depth and speed and playmaking ability in the secondary."

You can read much more about the 2006 recruiting class in this edition of *Huskers Illustrated*. Contributing editor Mike Babcock breaks down the class of 24, including eight junior college transfers, and we have a capsule

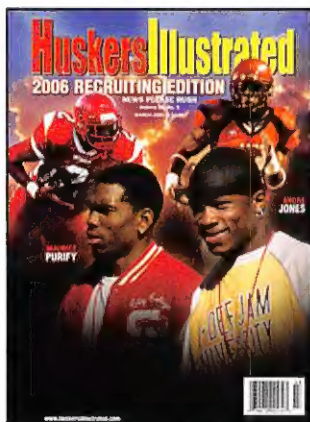
look at the newest Huskers.

In addition to all the recruiting news, our expanded March issue includes a look at baseball, softball, wrestling, gymnastics, track and field, swimming and diving and, of course, basketball.

When we last touched on basketball in the February issue, sophomore guard Joe McCray was featured for hitting the game-winning 3-pointer as the Huskers upset Oklahoma Jan. 7. Less than a month later, he was suspended and ultimately dismissed from the team. You can find out more about that twist of fate elsewhere in this issue.

Next time, we'll preview spring football practice, which begins March 22, leading up to the April 15 Spring Game.

Then it'll be time to look ahead to the fall and wonder how our latest cover subjects and their new teammates will fare. ■



ON THE COVER

Two of the top recruits in Nebraska's Class of 2006 are wide receiver Maurice Purify (left) and cornerback Andre Jones. Cover photos courtesy of Rivals.com, Fresno City College, City College of San Francisco. Design by Bret McVey, Blaze Graphics.

Huskers Illustrated

www.huskersillustrated.com

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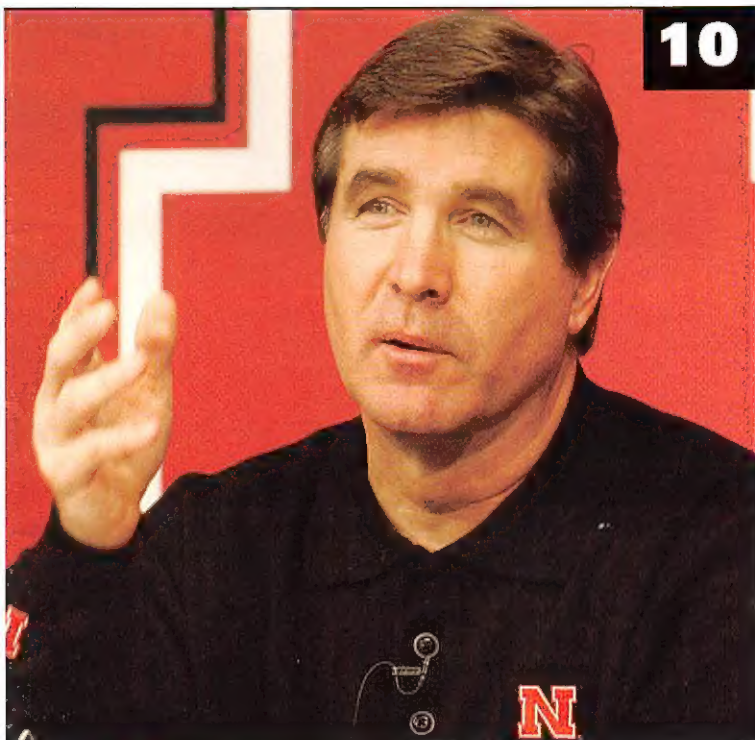
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Huskers Illustrated

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A closer look at the athletes in the Class of 2006.

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Nebraska went into the 2006 recruiting period with a number of needs that had to be addressed.

28 CALIFORNIA GOLD

Nebraska coaches scoured the country for talented safety prospects. They found what they were looking for on the West Coast.

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Fallen Hero

The end to Joe McCray's Cornhusker career came quickly.

In the Big 12 opener against Oklahoma, the sophomore from Fort Lauderdale, Fla., hit a 3-point shot with 5.6 seconds remaining for a 59-58 upset victory. Three weeks later, he was indefinitely suspended from the team. And less than a week after that, his suspension turned to dismissal.

McCray was dismissed for violating unspecified team rules, coach Barry Collier said in a brief statement released by the sports information office. "Joe is free to pursue his academic and athletic careers elsewhere, and we wish him the best in his future endeavors."

Collier subsequently told the Lincoln (Neb.) Journal Star that McCray's dismissal was "all about team and one guy." Eighteen games into his second season, he was finished.

The clutch shot against Oklahoma notwithstanding, McCray's play had taken a turn for the worse compared to last season, becoming as erratic as his behavior relative to the team.

He didn't start the Northern Colorado game on Jan. 3 and he was benched for the first half of the Iowa State game on Jan. 17, in both cases for disciplinary reasons. And he skipped practice the day before the Missouri game on Jan. 28, three days after being held scoreless in a loss at Colorado.

McCray missed the Missouri and Oklahoma State games, both victories, because of the suspension. And after the team returned from Stillwater, Collier announced the dismissal.

McCray's first season at Nebraska was stellar. He set Cornhusker and Big 12 records for 3-point shots (80) and earned all-conference honorable mention. He averaged 15.5 points, a Nebraska freshman record, and finished with just 12 fewer total points than freshman record-holder Dave Hoppen.

He started 24 of 28 games last season and led the Cornhuskers in minutes played, only the second freshman since at least 1979 to do so. Jake Muhleisen was the other.

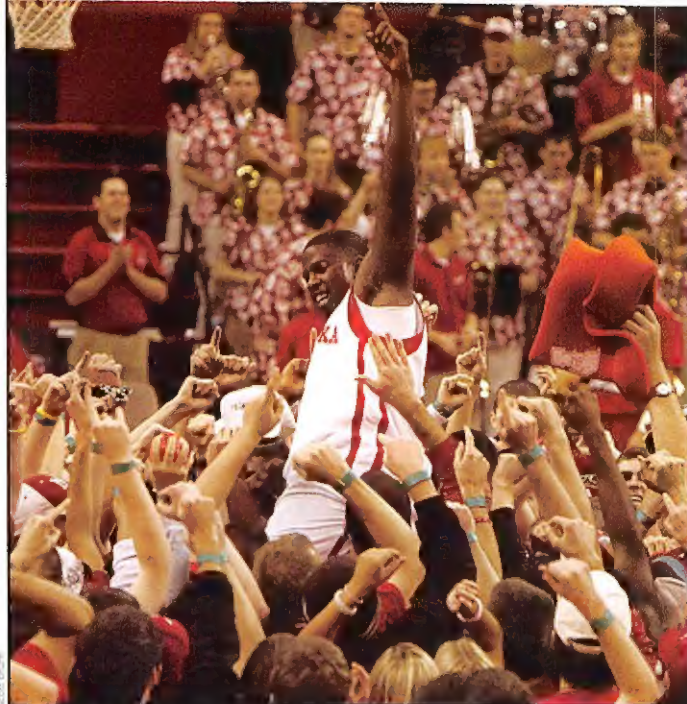
McCray, who reported overweight, struggled this season, however, averaging 9.8 points on 34.7-percent shooting from the field and often taking ill-advised 3-point shots.

He was among Nebraska's most high-profile recruits in recent years, coming from a North Carolina prep school (Laurinburg Institute), after playing on two Florida state championship teams at Dillard High in Fort Lauderdale. Rivalshoops.com rated him the top shooting guard prospect in the country.

McCray shot into prominence at Nebraska. And then, apparently, he shot himself down.

PICKING UP THE SLACK

One person's misfortune, whether self-created or not, can be another's opportunity. And so it was for Cornhusker freshman Jamel White (see 10 Questions on Page



Joe McCray hit the winning shot as NU upset Oklahoma Jan. 7.

33), who came up big off the bench in the two games for which McCray was suspended. White scored 28 points in the first, a 65-52 victory against Missouri at the Devaney Sports Center. And he caught a Wes Wilkinson airball and put it in the basket with 1.1 seconds remaining to give the Cornhuskers a 59-57 victory against Oklahoma State in Stillwater.

White, who was averaging 5.3 points, played 23 minutes in the Missouri game. He was 7-of-9 from the field, including 4-of-4 from 3-point range, and 10-of-11 from the free throw line.

The 28 points were two short of the Nebraska freshman record, set by Tyronn Lue against Oregon in 1995. Erick Strickland scored 28 points as a freshman in 1993, also against Missouri.

Junior Marcus Perry replaced McCray in the starting lineup for the Missouri game, his first start as a Cornhusker. With Perry at guard, Nebraska had its ninth different starting lineup this season.

SPEAKING OF SCORING

With every 3-point shot Kiera Hardy makes, she increases the Husker women's basketball team career record. And the 5-foot-6 guard from Kansas City, Mo., is just a junior.

Hardy broke Anna DeForge's career record in mid-January, hitting six 3-pointers on the way to scoring 29 points in a 70-62 loss against Texas at the Devaney Sports Center. The six increased her career total to 158, in 75 games. DeForge, a WNBA all-star, made 155 in 117 career games.

Hardy continues to climb on Nebraska's career-scoring list as well. Despite being held to nine points in a 54-42 victory against Iowa State on Feb. 1, she ranked 12th on the list. She had scored 1,189 career points, 96 from the top 10.

Not only has Hardy scored, she has helped her teammates as well. Midway through the conference season, she had 68 assists, one more than all of last season. And she was on pace to finish in Nebraska's top five in steals for a season and climb into the Cornhuskers' career top 10. (NU scores, schedule on Page 33.) ■



Junior Kiera Hardy is NU's career leader in 3-pointers.

Quick Hits

SCHEDULES COMPLETE

Nebraska's football schedules for the next two seasons were officially finalized in late January with the addition of five non-conference home games, including three in 2006.

The focus in scheduling the games was to provide Cornhusker fans with "as many opportunities as possible to see the games in person," athletic director Steve Pederson said in a release.

Economics also were a consideration, not only for the athletic department but also on the Lincoln area. A recent University of Nebraska-Lincoln study indicated that a seventh home football game for the 2006 season would have a \$6 million economic impact on the area.

The NCAA is allowing teams to play 12 games beginning in 2006. In addition to eight Big 12 games, the Cornhuskers will play non-conference home games against Louisiana Tech, Nicholls State and Troy. They also will travel to Los Angeles to play Southern California.

Nicholls State, located in Thibodaux, La., is Division I-AA. The Colonels were 6-4 and Southland Conference champions last season, losing to Furman in the first round of the I-AA playoffs.

Nebraska has played Louisiana Tech only once, defeating the Bulldogs 56-26 to open the 1998 season in the Eddie Robinson Classic at Memorial Stadium, and Troy three times. The Cornhuskers defeated the Trojans from Troy, Ala., in 2001 (42-14), 2002 (31-16) and 2003 (30-0).

Nebraska has played USC only twice, losing to the Trojans in Lincoln in 1969 (31-21) and playing a 21-21 tie at Los Angeles in the 1970 national championship season.

The Cornhuskers' 2006 home schedule also includes national champion Texas.

Nebraska's 2007 schedule includes nonconference home games against Nevada, USC and Ball State as well as a road trip to Winston-Salem, N.C., to play Wake Forest.

MORE WILL BE WATCHING

Memorial Stadium's capacity will exceed 80,000 in 2006, with the addition of approximately 6,500 seats as a result of the north end zone expansion. Nebraska received 14,970 requests for season tickets for those seats during a month-long application process beginning in mid-December. The majority of the season tickets were allocated to those making donations to the athletic department, with approximately 1,000 set aside for non-donors. Nebraska's NCAA-record, home-sellout streak is at 275 games.

SHOULDER PROBLEMS

Center Kurt Mann and running back Brandon Jackson are among those who will miss spring practice as a result of shoulder surgery. Jackson, a junior-to-be, injured the other shoulder in spring practice a year ago and was slowed during fall camp. "They told me it wasn't as severe as the other one, but it needed to be repaired and it was a good time of the year to get that done," coach Bill Callahan said.

Mann, a two-year starter, and Jackson weren't the only players to undergo surgeries following the Alamo Bowl game. The list included more than a dozen others, according to Callahan.

"A lot of little things catch up with you," he said. "So it's the right time of year to go in, get it cleaned out, get it fixed, repaired, rehabbed. Some will be back and some will miss spring ball."

Offensive linemen Andy Christensen, Cornealius Fuamatu-Thomas, Jordan Picou and Rodney Picou were among the others who underwent shoulder surgeries.

WELCOME BACK MATT

The Cornhuskers began their off-season strength and conditioning program in mid-January. Tight end Matt Herian, who was sidelined all of last season after suffering a fractured left leg in the Missouri game on Oct. 30, 2004, wasn't able to participate in the program at the start. But prior to having screws removed from the upper part of his leg, "we put him on film," said Callahan.

"We wanted to see where he was at . . . we evaluated his running, his explosion, his start, his burst, and he's very close to getting back to right where he was at."

2006 SCHEDULE

Sept. 2 Louisiana Tech
Sept. 9 Nicholls State
Sept. 16 @USC
Sept. 23 Troy
Sept. 30 Kansas
Oct. 7 @Iowa State
Oct. 14 @Kansas State
Oct. 21 Texas
Oct. 28 @Oklahoma St.
Nov. 4 Missouri
Nov. 11 @Texas A&M
Nov. 24 Colorado

2007 SCHEDULE

Sept. 1 Nevada
Sept. 8 @Wake Forest
Sept. 15 USC
Sept. 22 Ball State
Sept. 29 Iowa State
Oct. 6 @Missouri
Oct. 13 Oklahoma St.
Oct. 20 Texas A&M
Oct. 27 @Texas
Nov. 3 @Kansas
Nov. 10 Kansas State
Nov. 23 @Colorado

Watson, his new position coach, asked about him immediately after being hired. Herian and Joe Klopfenstein, whom Watson coached at Colorado, "were two of the same kind of guys, just awesome talents," Watson said. "I remember seeing him two years ago, what a great receiver he is."

Herian is one of three tight ends in Cornhusker history with 1,000 career receiving yards.

Herian is expected to be ready to go in spring practice, which begins on March 22 and concludes with the Red-White intrasquad game on April 15, with kickoff set for 12:30 p.m.

SOUDER AND DYCHES LEAVE

Scholarship players Jeff Souder and David Dyches have left the program. Souder, from Bellevue, Neb., West High School, played as a true freshman, primarily on special teams, arriving as a safety but moving to weakside linebacker late in the season after injuries depleted the position. He was No. 2 on the pre-bowl depth chart, behind sophomore Lance Brandenburg. He played in 10 games and was credited with six tackles. "I'm not sure about football," he told the Omaha World-Herald. Dyches, a junior place-kicker, transferred to Northern Colorado, joining Scott Downing, his position coach at Nebraska.

Adam Gibson, a walk-on offensive lineman from Indianapolis, Ind., also left the program.

NFL COMBINE INVITEES

Four Cornhusker seniors have been invited to the NFL Scouting Combine. Safety Daniel Bullocks, running back Cory Ross and defensive linemen Le Kevin Smith and Titus Adams will participate at the Combine in Indianapolis on Feb. 23-27. The four also played in post-season all-star games.

Bullocks' play on special teams sparked the North to a 31-14 victory in the Senior Bowl game. He recovered two muffed punts, one of them in the end zone for a touchdown and the other to set up a touchdown. Ross rushed for 18 yards on six carries and Smith made two tackles in the East-West Shrine Game, while Adams was credited with three tackles in the Hula Bowl game.



C. Tomasevich

OLYMPIAN

Former Cornhusker football player Curt Tomasevich is among nine athletes selected to compete with the United States men's bobsled team at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy. He was a walk-on from Shelby, Neb., who played fullback and linebacker at Nebraska from 1999 to 2003.

The men's two-man bobsled qualifying is slated for Feb. 18, with finals the following day, while the men's four-man competition is scheduled for the following week, Feb. 24-25.

SOCCER RECRUITS

The Nebraska soccer team will welcome seven new faces this fall, joining nine returning starters, including reigning two-time Big 12 Player of the Year and NSCAA All-American Brittany Timko.

Julie Berkshire, MF, Omaha, Neb. (Westside/West Omaha Gladiators); Anna Caniglia, MF/D, Omaha, Neb. (Millard North/West Omaha Gladiators); Brittney Lanier, F/MF, Dallas (Trinity Christian Academy/Dallas Texans); Carly Peetz, F, Lincoln, Neb. (Pius X/Sparta Velocity); Shay Powell, F/MF, Dallas (Lutheran/Dallas Sting); Jackie Walsh, F, Omaha, Neb. (Burke/West Omaha Gladiators); Jacy Wicker, D/MF, Dallas (Colleyville Heritage/Dallas Texans)

IN MEMORIAM

Monte Engebritson, the starting tight end on the Cornhuskers' "Scoring Explosion" team in 1983, died after a lengthy battle with cancer in Blacksburg, Va., in late January. He was 45.

Engebritson walked on from Hastings, Neb., High School and earned three letters.

At the time, he was among the fastest tight ends in Cornhusker history. His best game as a receiver was against Penn State in the first Kickoff Classic. He caught three passes for 28 yards and the game's second touchdown in the 44-6 victory. He finished his career with two receptions for 12 yards in Nebraska's 31-30 loss against Miami in the 1984 Orange Bowl game. ■

Running The Show

Quiet, unassuming catcher Christy willing to take on extra role



Mike BABCOCK

WELL, HE DID PLAY QUARTERBACK in high school, Jeff Christy said with a smile — until he switched to tight end for his senior season, that is. But, yes, the comparison was sort of based in fact.

Christy was courteous, humoring the writer who asked the question.

Earlier, Nebraska baseball coach Mike Anderson had described the senior from Lincoln as the team's quarterback. "And I can't emphasize that enough," he said. "If we had play-calls, if we did all those things and we sent plays into the game, it would be Jeff Christy who we're sending them to."

Christy is Zac Taylor in shin guards and a chest protector, you might say.

"He's the guy who helps us run the show," Anderson said.

The Cornhuskers' chances of returning to the College World Series rest on a pitching staff that includes All-America candidates Joba Chamberlain, Johnny Dorn and Brett Jensen. But behind every successful pitching staff is a good catcher, which is where Christy comes in.

His leadership has been "tremendous, absolutely tremendous," Anderson said.

Christy might seem an unlikely leader. He's quiet and unassuming, "one of those guys that will never give himself enough credit because that's the type of person he is," said Chamberlain.

They've known each other for a long time, competing against each other in high school.

And "ever since I've known him, he's been that way," Chamberlain said. "That's just the way he's been brought up. His family has raised him like that, and they've done a great job."

Christy's character hasn't changed. But he has become more assertive.

"He's getting on people. It lights a fire under people's butts," said Chamberlain. "It's kind of a transition for Jeff because he is that quiet guy, real laid-back and conservative."

"It's nice to see a little fire. He's stepped up and taken that leadership role to the fullest. He'll get after you. If you throw a bad pitch, he'll let you know it. He'll go in the dugout and let you know what you need to do better next time. I'll think, 'That was a good pitch.' But Jeff demands it out of you, that perfect pitch, that perfect spot. It's nice to have a guy like that behind the plate."

The coaches' confidence in Christy is such that he could be allowed to call pitches this season, something he hasn't done since high school. And Chamberlain shares that confidence.

"It's kind of like, 'Oh, if Jeff throws it down, I'm going to throw it,'" he said.

Dave Bingham, the Cornhuskers' new pitching coach, has told Christy he needs to be able to call his own pitches. And "I'm willing to take that extra role," Christy said. "I like calling my own games. It's kind of like a chess match, I guess. That just means a little more study for me."

"I really enjoy it. It's challenging. I look forward to it."

Even when the coaches call the pitches and he relays the signals, pitchers can shake off his signs. "But I'll let 'em know if it's wrong," he said with a laugh. "Every once in a while I'll have to go out there (to the mound) and tell them, 'This is what we're throwing.'"

Christy's leadership goes beyond handling pitchers. He set an example in his off-season strength and conditioning work, getting stronger and dropping 10 percent body fat.

Last season, Christy started a school-record 64 games at catcher, which meant a lot of icing and time spent sitting in the Whirlpool. It didn't negatively affect his performance, however.

Though he batted only .236, he drove in 32 runs and provided some clutch hitting during postseason play. He also finished with a team-high 12 sacrifices and hit .294 with runners in scoring position.

He spent the summer with the Santa Barbara Foresters, concentrating on his hitting. And he's "really worked hard" with Cornhusker hitting coach Andy Sawyers. "Hopefully, it pays off," he said. "I feel a lot better. I've always known I could hit. I proved that in junior college. If I want to

keep going and take the next step up, professional baseball, I know I have to be better in that area."

Though he could move up in the batting order, he'll begin in the lower third, where he was last season, Anderson said. "If we can get 36 to 46 RBIs out of him, that's a great contribution."

His first responsibility, however, is handling the pitching staff.

"He's stepped up and taken that leadership role to the fullest," said Chamberlain.

He's Anderson's quarterback, the one who runs the show.

"I've really taken it upon myself to take that leap," Christy said. "I knew coming into the year I'd have to do that, kind of step up a little bit in that area. It's real easy for me, I guess."

"Right now, I'm real comfortable." ■



Jeff Christy started a school-record 64 games at catcher.

Mike Babcock is a former sports columnist for the Lincoln Journal Star. He has covered Nebraska football for more than 25 years. Mike can be reached at MBABCOCK1@neb.rr.com or P.O. Box 6782, Lincoln, NE 68506.

'About Team And One Guy'

Collier says his ultimate decision on McCray stemmed from a culmination of concerns



Curt McKEEVER

INQUIRING MINDS wanted his unique insight to the Nebraska men's basketball team winning its first three games after he'd removed Joe McCray from the squad, but Barry Collier wasn't biting.

To the Huskers' sixth-year coach, there was no dramatic dynamic to the Huskers creating success minus a talent they couldn't live without last season.

"We're playing better," Collier said of a three-game winning streak that left NU 15-6 overall and 5-3 (and tied for third place) for only the second time in 10 years halfway through the Big 12 Conference schedule. "It wasn't one man's responsibility earlier in the season any more than it's one man now. We've got a team that's really focused. They get along extremely well and kind of depend on one another."

Nebraska had gotten off to a 2-0 start to Big 12 play for only the second time thanks to McCray hitting a three-pointer with 5.6 seconds left to give the Huskers a 59-58 win against then-No. 12 Oklahoma.

McCray, though, had struggled to show the form that led to him sinking a Big 12 single-season record 80 three-pointers while establishing a Nebraska freshman-record scoring average of 15.5 points last season.

When Collier announced he was putting the sophomore on indefinite suspension the day before NU's Jan. 28 game against Missouri, McCray was averaging 9.8 points and shooting just 34.7 percent.

McCray had not started a Jan. 3 game against Northern Colorado after breaking an unspecified team rule and also had been benched for the first half of the Jan. 17 home loss to Iowa State as penalty for missing a team function. When he failed to show up for practice on Jan. 26, the day after being held scoreless for the first time in his career during a loss at Colorado, Collier informed his team McCray was being suspended.

Nebraska then beat Missouri 65-52 before going to Oklahoma State and pulling off a 59-57 victory, just its third in Stillwater, Okla., since 1987.

The next day, Collier announced that McCray — whom he had tried to contact numerous times but hadn't communicated with since meeting with him the day prior to the Missouri contest — would no longer be a part of the program. Later, when asked by the Lincoln Journal Star if he understood that some people might think Nebraska's two victories affected his decision, Collier responded: "What's right is right. This is all about team and one guy."

"There was kind of a time issue with dealing with the team. We were 24 hours from a game (against Missouri), then we had a quick turnaround for Oklahoma State — so it was kind of finalizing things."

The NU coach added that his ultimate decision on McCray stemmed from a culmination of concerns, but declined to say whether any one carried significantly greater weight. McCray had also been cited in the early hours of Dec. 2 for assault after confronting two men who were talking to his girlfriend. But

Collier said McCray had received notice from the county attorney informing him that no charges would be filed and that the issue had nothing to do with his subsequent disciplinary action.

Minus the 6-foot-5 guard from Fort Lauderdale, the Huskers have approached games like they realize they'll have to go about things more collectively, as opposed to waiting for McCray to unleash one of those 20-point outings that were so frequent last season.

"Everybody was out playing for each other," said senior guard and co-captain Jason Dourisseau following the win against Missouri. "There was no selfishness out on the court. We know we have to stick together through adversity and stick together as a team."

Against the Tigers, Nebraska got a 28-point, off-the-bench performance from guard Jamel White. His effort equaled the second-highest total by a Husker freshman.

White started against Oklahoma State (giving NU its 10th different lineup of the season) and was there to put back an offensive rebound for the game-winning basket with 1.1 seconds remaining.

Nebraska followed that win by rallying from 11 points down and holding Baylor to 15 second-half points in a 60-45 triumph.

Prior to that 3-0 spurt, NU had given up its three highest point totals — 96, 88 and 81 — in losses to Kansas, Iowa State and Colorado.

"We went through a real tough stretch and . . . It wasn't so much, 'Oh, I guess we need to learn to play hard,'" Collier said. "But we did face a tough time and just realized it was going to take more toughness and more helping on defense to get anything done, including rebounding. I mean, if you're going to finish a play with an offensive rebound for the opponent, you're in trouble, and that hurt us a number of times in those three games."

In the Oklahoma State victory, all five Husker starters played at least 30 minutes. It was the first time since a 2003 Big 12 Tournament contest against Missouri that five players logged at least 30 out of a possible 40 minutes.

Collier offered that he still feels like the Huskers can go four or five deep into their bench — with most reserves utilized in short stints.

While point guard Charles Richardson agreed, he offered that what had been most important to Nebraska's surge was the attitude taken by everyone who got in games — to raise the Huskers' intensity level.

"I know there was a lot of speculation out there saying we weren't going to be as good without Joe," Richardson said. "It's given us a lot of motivation to play even harder."

And, yes, with a subtle change in style.

"We've adjusted to not having a spot-up shooter. Joe was our best," Richardson said. "Now, we move the ball around more to get the best shot possible." ■



Coach Barry Collier
said his team was
"really focused."

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter, covering the University of Nebraska for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football he is the primary beat writer for the men's basketball and baseball teams.

Looking

Recruiting class adds size in the offensive line and at receiver

By Mike Babcock

Looks aren't everything, of course. But the Nebraska football team's 2006 scholarship recruiting class has a Big 12 look. And that's what coach Bill Callahan wanted.

Never mind that the class isn't ranked among the nation's elite, as last year's was, or that it includes only one five-star player and doesn't include a quarterback. It still looks good.

And because of it "there's no question, no doubt in my mind, that we will be a better-looking football team as we take the field in September," Callahan said on letter-of-intent-signing day.

"It fits the profile of what a Big 12 team should look like."

Such a profile includes "big-bodied" wide receivers, and the class has four, the smallest being 6-foot-3, 190-pound Tyrell Spain, who signed a year ago but had to get his academics in order. "I believe this is the biggest receiver class we've had here at Nebraska," said Callahan. And so it is.

Spain, a transfer from Mesa College, is enrolled in classes and will participate in spring practice. So will offensive linemen Jacob

FEATURE STORY

Nebraska coach Bill Callahan officially announced the signings of 24 football recruits during a Feb. 1 news conference in Lincoln.

Hickman, a first-semester grayshirt, and Victory Haines, a transfer from Snow College. Hickman and Haines are among seven offensive linemen in the class of 24 announced on Feb. 1. Freshman tackle Matt Slauson, a starter at season's end, also counts in the class.

Haines is among eight junior college transfers in the class, the most prominent being Andre Jones, a five-star defensive back from Fort Walton Beach, Fla., by way of Fresno City College.

Defensive backs, of which there are five, were a priority, along with the offensive linemen.

"Those are the two areas we targeted," said Callahan.

Four of the linemen were listed at 300 or more pounds, the heaviest being Carl Nicks (6-5, 325), a transfer from Hartnell Junior College. The emphasis was on adding "more size, more bulk, thicker, squarer, bigger guys," Callahan said. "We will be a



big football team in the fall.

"We added size to this team, not only in the offensive line but at receiver and added some real quality depth and speed and playmaking ability in the secondary."

Nebraska lost one potential playmaker in the secondary on signing day when Ashlee Palmer, a transfer from Compton College, picked Washington over the Cornhuskers.

Even though the three-star defensive back had signed a scholarship tender with Nebraska in December,

g Good



"There's no question, no doubt in my mind, that we will be a better-looking football team as we take the field in September. It fits the profile of what a Big 12 team should look like."

— Coach Bill Callahan

as a mid-year enrollee, he didn't meet university entrance requirements. However, "I don't know if that battle is over with just yet," said Callahan. "We'll see. It'll be an interesting scenario as it plays out. We would certainly love to have him here at Nebraska, and we're doing everything possible to get him to be part of this class."

The Cornhuskers signed four other defensive backs besides Jones, all of them from high school: Major Culbert, Ricky Thenarse, Anthony

West and Corey Young. They will help a depleted secondary — at safety in particular, following the departure of Daniel Bullocks and Blake Tiedtke.

Jones was recruited as a cornerback, joining returning starters Cortney Grixby and Zack Bowman. The incoming freshmen could play either cornerback or safety. They'll begin as cornerbacks "to see what their coverage skills are like," Callahan said. "We put them in the 'bump,' put them in the 'off' tech-

nique to see how they're going to function in space. And, of course, there are a lot of individual drills where we will evaluate their ability to tackle and their physicalness. We'll look at that closely.

"We'll just mix and match and see how it all falls."

All of the recruits will have an opportunity to prove themselves and earn playing time immediately, in some cases on special teams if not at their regular positions.

But "nothing's been guaranteed.

Nothing's been promised," said Callahan.

The quality of his third recruiting class at Nebraska will be revealed in time. For now, it looks good. "There's no question in my mind that we have elevated our talent level and we have added value to our football team," he said. "We have a profile and a template that we follow very closely.

"And I believe we met our needs relative to the plan we set out with."

WHERE'S THE QUARTERBACK?

The class included a prize quarterback until about a week before the Alamo Bowl game, of course. Josh Freeman from Grandview, Mo., orally committed to accepting a scholarship in June. He was going to enroll at mid-term and go through spring practice. Actually, he did enroll for second-semester classes, but at Kansas State instead of Nebraska, rescinding his commitment by text message.

"I love quarterbacks. You can't have enough of them. I think it's key you try to attract a quarterback here," Callahan said during a news conference to announce the hiring of Shawn Watson.

That the 2006 class lacked a quarterback, however, wasn't a concern.

"I was not going to get into a situation where I was just going to take a quarterback to take one," said Callahan. "There are a lot of great quarterbacks coming up in this class next year that we're excited about, that we've already visited on the road. So I'm in no rush to add another quarterback.

"I want to make sure we get the right guy for us. It's a situation where we want the people, the players, that want us. And if it doesn't work out, it doesn't work out."

The timing of Freeman's decision to back out on Nebraska left the Cornhuskers little opportunity to establish ties with another quarterback, believed to be Garrett Green from Sherman Oaks, Calif. "We went after one quarterback that I really liked on film. We just got into it too late," Callahan said.

Green signed a letter of intent with Southern California.

The day after Freeman backed out, Rulon Davis, a defensive lineman at Mt. San Antonio College, also "de-committed." The ex-United States Marine opted for California instead. "That's recruiting," said Callahan. "I think you see de-commitments across the board in college football. It's not unusual. I think we've stolen a few in our past, just like everybody else does. So it all evens out."

Nebraska has five quarterbacks on scholarship: returning starter Zac Taylor, Harrison Beck, Joey Ganz, Beau Davis and Jordan Adams. Taylor will be a senior. Beck will be a redshirted freshman. Ganz will be a sophomore. And Davis and Adams will be juniors.

Because this class didn't include a quarterback might there be two in the 2007 recruiting class? "That's possible," Callahan said. "We'll take a look at the needs . . . as it plays out.

"But that's surely, distinctly, a possibility."

HE'S BACK, AT RUNNING BACK

Leon Jackson isn't part of the 2006 recruiting class. He was prominent in the 2005 class and contributed on special teams as a true freshman. In some ways, however, he'll be starting over in the spring, assuming he isn't immobilized by an identity crisis.

Jackson began training camp as a running back but quickly agreed to a move to safety, the position at which Nebraska had projected him. He spent practice time as a wide receiver on the scout team. The coaches picked him as the offensive scout team player of the year, in fact.

During bowl preparations, Callahan indicated

that Jackson would move to wide receiver in the spring. But on letter-of-intent-signing day, he announced that Jackson would return to running back.

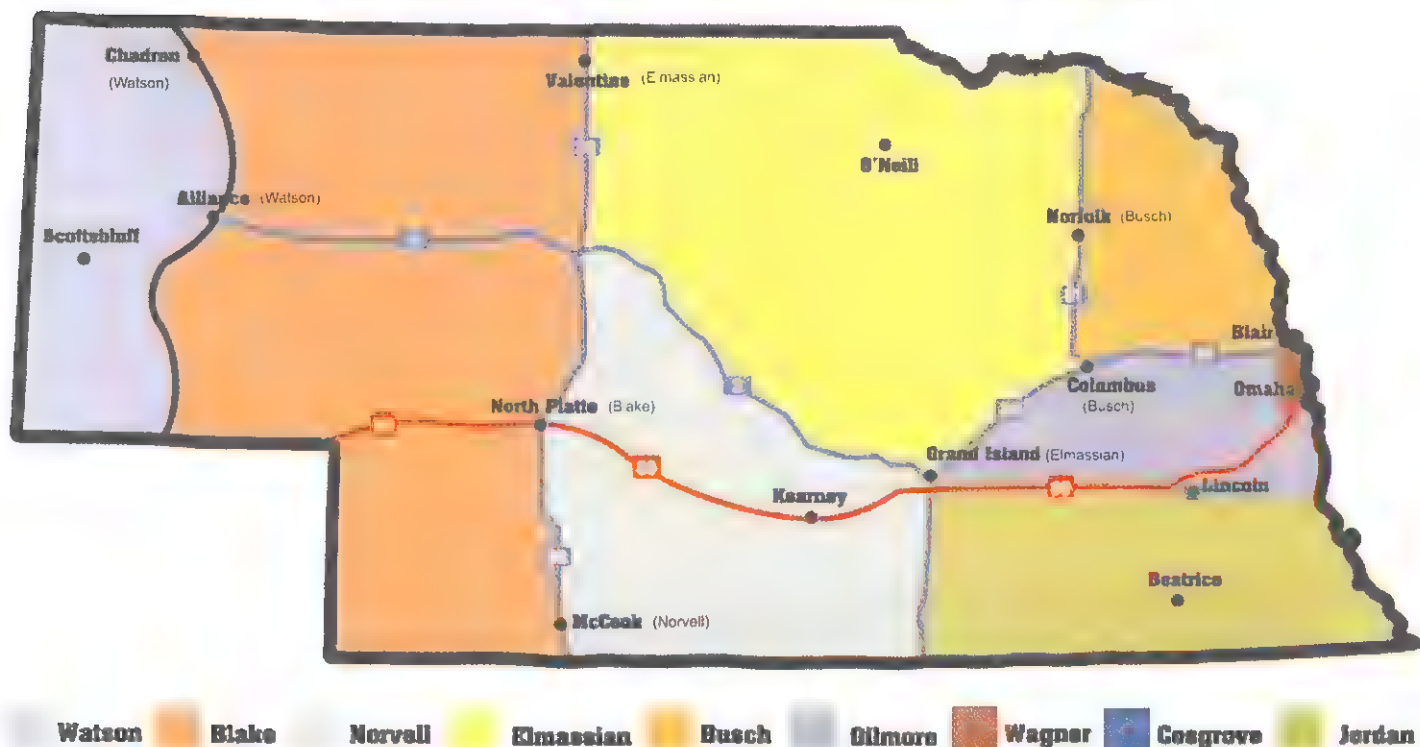
"He really wants to be a running back in this offense, so we're going to give him that opportunity, and have the opportunity to split him out and work him in some routes as well," Callahan said.

Jackson will join fellow sophomores-to-be Marlon



Cornerback Andre Jones, a Rivals.com five-star recruit from Fresno City (Calif.) Community College, started his college career at Kentucky in 2003.

NEBRASKA RECRUITING AREA



A Nebraska map was displayed at the letter-of-intent-signing news conference to show the in-state recruiting responsibilities for every assistant coach.

Lucky and Cody Glenn at the position in the spring, while junior-to-be Brandon Jackson recovers from another shoulder surgery.

Despite those four, "I just don't think we're deep enough," said Callahan.

So Kenny Wilson, a transfer from Butler County Community College, will arrive in the fall. Wilson is "a big playmaker, (with) great speed, hands, power," Callahan said. "He has excelled at both the high school level and at the college level. He's shown the ability to do a lot of different things."

JUCO JUBILATION

Callahan has embraced junior college players. His three recruiting classes have included 24 junior college transfers, eight of them this year and 12 last year. By comparison, Nebraska's recruiting classes from 1982 through 2003 included only 24 junior college transfers combined.

Callahan was asked if he planned to recruit fewer junior college players in the future. "We'll see," he said. "I hate to make any statement that I can't back up, or predict. I don't know. I really don't. We'll see where we're at a year from now and see how injuries play into certain scenarios.

"I don't have a crystal ball. There are injuries. There are all types of circumstantial things that come up through the course of the year that alter your decision-making."

The recruiting focus will be on the best players available, he said, "whether it's from the high school ranks or the junior college ranks. We stay flexible in that respect."

Taylor, a transfer from Butler County Community College like Wilson, showed extraordinary physical and



Kenny Wilson of Butler County (Kan.) Community College will join the running back competition in the fall.

mental toughness and broke several school passing records, completing 237-of-430 (55.1 percent) for 2,653 yards and 19 touchdowns with only 12 interceptions.

He might well have been the Big 12 offensive newcomer of the year.

Bowman, Frantz Hardy, Ola Dagunduro and Barry Cryer all were in the regular rotation. Bowman started the last five games, while Steve Octavien earned the starting job at weakside linebacker but suffered a season-ending injury to his left leg early in the second quarter of the opener.

RECRUITING SALES PITCH

Nebraska was successful despite

the departure of recruiting coordinator Scott Downing, now the head coach at Northern Colorado, because "he finished out very strongly and really set up the transition for Coach Wags (Dennis Wagner) to come in and help," said Callahan. "And again, it goes back to this team-recruiting concept that we pride ourselves on. So it was a very easy transition . . ."

Even though assistant coaches are assigned specific recruiting areas, "there's a lot of double-teaming, triple-teaming that takes place during the sales phase," Callahan said. "We identify them and we evaluate them and then we go ahead and we sell. We sell the heck out of them to come to Nebraska."

He and his staff sell recruits on a system that can prepare them to play professional football. But that isn't necessarily the first subject of discussion. "The No. 1 thing you've got to sell is academics and the opportunity to obtain a degree at the University of Nebraska," said Callahan.

"Kids make decisions for a lot of reasons. But it is the No. 1 thing that we go in a home with, talk about education first. Then we dovetail into the other areas of the program."

The academics pitch is reinforced statistically. Nebraska has led the Big 12 Conference in exhausted eligibility rate for the past three years. The rate this year was 93 percent, 2 percentage points higher than a year ago. The exhausted eligibility rate was established in 1991-92.

"When you go in a home and have those types of numbers that you can illustrate and show to a parent and a recruit, boy, that's powerful," Callahan said.

DEEP IN THE HEART OF TEXAS

Callahan has referred to California, Florida and Texas as the "big three" states in recruiting, for obvious reasons. Nebraska has recruited especially well in California the past two years, attracting 15 players. The Cornhuskers have signed three players from Florida in each of the last two years, but only two total from Texas: Glenn last year and wide receiver Will Henry from El Paso this year.

Texas is "fertile ground, where there are a lot of players. Let's face it, the population base is tremendous down there," said Callahan. And the quality of competition is high.

A Nebraska map was displayed at the letter-of-intent-signing news conference to show the in-state recruiting responsibilities for every assistant coach. There was no Texas map, but "I can tell you, there's a big old picture (of Texas) in the staff room about where we're going," he said.

"We divided that state up pretty good, too, with our staff and they're all accountable."

At least five assistants, and "possibly six," will recruit in Texas. ■

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NEBRASKA FOOTBALL SIGNEES

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown (High School/College)
Pierre Allen	DE	6-5	222	Denver, Colo. (Thomas Jefferson HS)
Steve Allen	LB	6-2	230	Delray Beach, Fla. (Atlantic HS/ Fresno City, Calif., CC)
Cruz Barrett	OL	6-4	315	Daytona Beach, Fla. (Mainland HS)
Major Culbert	DB	5-11	198	Harbor City, Calif. (Nathaniel Narbonne HS)
*Victory Haines	OL	6-7	285	Logan, Utah (Logan HS/Snow, Utah, College)
Ricky Henry	OL	6-3	280	Omaha, Neb. (Omaha Burke HS)
Will Henry	WR	6-5	195	El Paso, Texas (J.M. Hanks HS)
*Jacob Hickman	OL	6-3	270	Bakersfield, Calif. (Centennial HS)
Menelik Holt	WR	6-4	215	San Diego, Calif. (St. Augustine HS)
Seth Jensen	DT	6-3	275	Fort Morgan, Colo. (Fort Morgan HS)
Brandon Johnson	DT	6-3	312	Chicago, Ill. (Marshall HS/Graceland University/ Compton, Calif., CC)
Andre Jones	DB	6-0	192	Fort Walton Beach, Fla. (Choctawatchee HS/ Kentucky/Fresno City, Calif., CC)
D.J. Jones	OL	6-5	300	Omaha, Neb. (Omaha Central HS)
Ben Martin	DE	6-4	265	Lincoln, Neb. (Lincoln Southwest HS)
Mike McNeill	TE	6-4	215	Kirkwood, Mo. (Kirkwood HS)
Carl Nicks	OL	6-5	325	Salinas, Calif. (North Salinas HS/New Mexico St./ Hartnell, Calif., JC)
Maurice Purify	WR	6-4	210	Eureka, Calif. (Eureka HS/ San Francisco City College)
Mike Smith	DE	6-6	260	Las Vegas, Nev. (Palo Verde HS)
*Tyrell Spain	WR	6-3	190	San Diego, Calif. (Hoover HS/ San Diego Mesa College)
Ricky Thenarse	DB	6-0	185	Los Angeles, Calif. (Jordan HS)
Anthony West	DB	6-0	195	San Diego, Calif. (Point Loma HS)
Keith Williams	OL	6-5	310	Florissant, Mo. (McCluer North HS)
Kenny Wilson	RB	6-0	220	Liberal, Kan. (Liberal HS/Butler County, Kan., CC)
Corey Young	DB	6-0	190	Omaha, Neb. (Millard North HS)

*Indicates mid-year signee

Capsules compiled by Doug Horwich, Rick Shaw, Brian Hill & NU Sports Information

Photos: HuskersIllustrated.com, Rivals.com



PIERRE ALLEN

Defensive End Denver, Colo. (Thomas Jefferson)

Height: 6-5 Weight: 222 40-yard dash: 4.6

BIO: Defensive end Pierre Allen comes to Nebraska from Thomas Jefferson High School in Denver, Colo., the same school that former Husker Cory Ross attended. The 6-foot-5, 222-pound speedster runs a 4.6 40-yard dash. He helped coach Dan Trumble's Spartans into the Class 5A state football playoffs the past three seasons, including a 6-5 record this season. Rivals.com ranks Allen as the 34th-best weak-side defensive end in the country. He was named to the SuperPrep All-America 277. Allen also plays basketball for Thomas Jefferson and helped lead the team to a 4A (second largest classification in Colorado) state basketball title as a junior, earning MVP honors in the state tournament. He posted a triple-double in the championship game. Allen was the 4A player of the year as a junior, averaging more than 20 points per game and led class 4A in rebounding (14.3) and blocked shots (5.3). Through 15 games this season, Allen ranked eighth in Class 4A in scor-

ing, averaging 20.2 points per game, and led the class in rebounds (224), and was second in blocks (65). On the football field, Allen led his team in tackles and was named team defensive MVP as a junior. Allen only visited Nebraska but also had offers from Colorado, Colorado State, Michigan State, Syracuse, Washington and Wyoming. Allen earned Denver Post first-team All-Colorado honors as an athlete. Allen, the son of Tara Jenkins and Destry Allen, was born on Nov. 18, 1987.

WHY PIERRE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "When I went on my (official) visit there, I really liked the coaches, players and the focus they put on academics. I didn't expect to commit on my visit, but I liked everything so much I just went ahead and got it over with."

AAU BASKETBALL COACH 'TREE' ADAMS: "His interest is in football, but he's passionate about basketball. In the long run, he'll probably be better at football, though. He knows that he has a better chance at being an NFL player than an NBA player."



STEVE ALLEN

Linebacker Delray Beach, Fla. (Atlantic/Fresno, Calif., CC)

Height: 6-2 Weight: 230 40-yard dash: 4.5

BIO: Steve Allen, a 6-2, 230-pound linebacker, is one of eight junior college recruits to sign with the Huskers and one of three Florida natives in the 2006 recruiting class. Allen, ranked No. 44 on the Rivals.com Junior College Top 100, runs a 4.5-second 40-yard dash and chose the Huskers after also receiving offers from Michigan State and Central Florida. Allen was a teammate of Nebraska defensive back recruit Andre Jones at Fresno City (Calif.) College. As a freshman playing for coach Tony Caviglia at Fresno City, Allen recorded 66 tackles, including one sack and nine tackles for losses, while also adding two forced fumbles, two fumble recoveries and an 88-yard interception return for a touchdown. As a sophomore, he recorded 81 total tackles, including five tackles for losses, five quarterback hurries, two sacks and a forced fumble in earning honorable-mention Junior College Wire All-America

honors. College Football News ranks Allen as the 30th-best junior college prospect in the country and the third-best junior college linebacker in the nation. Allen is ranked No. 37 on the SuperPrep JUCO 100. Allen attended Delray Beach (Fla.) Atlantic High School, where he recorded 108 total tackles, including 35 tackles for losses and eight sacks. He originally committed to Iowa State in 2003. Allen will have three seasons to play two at Nebraska. He was born on Dec. 3, 1983.

WHY STEVE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I liked the players, the team, the coaches and the fans. The people really care about football here. And I loved the Tunnel Walk. It (his visit) was a '10,' definitely. I liked everything about it."

FRESNO CITY COLLEGE COACH TONY CAVIGLIA: "His upside is that he's big and maybe still growing. He's extremely explosive. He can run. He can stop the run, and he can cover a tight end."



CRUZ BARRETT

Offensive Line Daytona Beach, Fla. (Mainland)

Height: 6-4 Weight: 315 40-yard dash: 5.41

BIO: Offensive lineman Cruz Barrett of Daytona Beach (Fla.) Mainland High School is one of three recruits from the state of Florida to sign with Nebraska. Barrett is one of three signees from the state of Florida.

The 6-4, 314-pound Barrett ranks as the 36th-best offensive guard prospect in the nation, according to Rivals.com, while also ranking as the 60th-best player in the state of Florida. Barrett also received scholarship offers from Florida, Florida State, North Carolina, Oklahoma and West Virginia. PrepStar placed Barrett on its All-Southeast region team. Barrett is ranked among the SuperPrep Florida Top 96. Barrett was a two-year starter for coach John Maronto at Mainland, which finished 8-3 in 2005 in Florida's second-largest classification. Mainland currently has 41 players in college football at all levels. He is ranked as the 55th-best prospect in the state of Florida on the Tallahassee Democrat's Sunshine 75.

Barrett also plays basketball for Mainland. Barrett was born on April 30, 1988. He lives with guardian Janice Wilson.

WHY CRUZ CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I knew after visiting that's where I wanted to go because of how the fans are and just the whole atmosphere up there. My teammates kept telling me 'it's too cold up there or it's too far away,' but I just knew it was the place for me, so once I was sure, I was ready to give them my pledge. And that was what I did."

MAINLAND COACH JOHN MARONTO: "He is absolutely a huge kid, and he has one of the biggest wing spans I've seen on anyone. I mean this kid also plays basketball at his size, which is amazing to me. The big thing with Cruz is that he's got a great upside. Like a lot of freshmen, he may find himself redshirting at a program like Nebraska. But the instruction and the environment there is going to be outstanding for Cruz."



MAJOR CULBERT

Defensive Back Harbor City, Calif. (Nathaniel Narbonne)

Height: 5-11 Weight: 198 40-yard dash: 4.73

BIO: Defensive back Major Culbert was one of Nebraska's final commitments, pledging to the Huskers in mid-January. The 5-11, 198-pound Culbert ranks as the 39th-best athlete in the nation, according to Rivals.com, which also ranks him as the 34th-best player in the state of California.

As a junior, Culbert ran for 1,116 yards and 12 touchdowns, while recording 90 tackles, seven sacks, two interceptions and three fumble recoveries. He earned first-team all-league honors and second-team all-area honors for his efforts in leading Nathaniel Narbonne High School in Harbor City, Calif., to a 10-3 record. As a senior, Culbert enjoyed a breakout year. Coach Manuel Douglas' Narbonne squad finished 6-5 as Culbert ran for 1,955 yards and 17 touchdowns and added 10 receptions for 123 yards, while recording 106 tackles, seven sacks and two interceptions. Culbert chose Nebraska after also

receiving offers from Oregon, UCLA, Washington, California, Fresno State, San Diego State and UNLV. Culbert holds the Narbonne school record for most yards rushing in a single game with 332 yards, and rushed for more than 4,000 yards and 37 touchdowns during his high school career. He was selected as player of the year by the Daily Breeze Newspaper in Torrance, Calif. Culbert also runs track at Narbonne, participating on the 4x100 meter relay team. Culbert, the son of Renee Culbert, was born on Dec. 29, 1987. His godparents are Orlando and Maria Pile.

WHY MAJOR CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I thought about it and I prayed. The people were real nice and real friendly."

NARBONNE COACH MANUEL DOUGLAS: "Most people have looked at him as a defensive player, but he's great on offense. At whatever position he plays, Major is just an animal."



VICTORY HAINES

Offensive Line Logan, Utah (Snow, Utah, College)

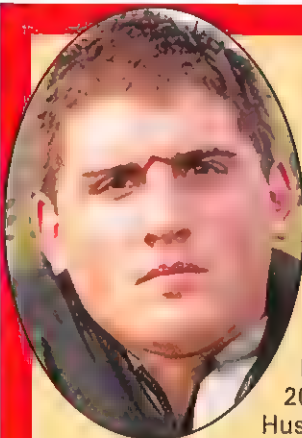
Height: 6-7 Weight: 285 40-yard dash: 5.1

BIO: Victory Haines, a 6-7, 285-pound offensive lineman from Snow College in Ephraim, Utah, officially signed his letter of intent to attend Nebraska in December and enrolled in January. He is the first

Nebraska scholarship recruit from the state of Utah since Manaia Brown signed with the Huskers in 2000. Haines was ranked 77th on the Rivals.com Junior College Top 100, earning three stars on the recruiting service's five-star rating system. Originally from Logan, Utah, Haines chose Nebraska over Duke, Hawaii, Illinois and New Mexico State. Haines graduated from Logan High School in 2001, where he led his squad to a state title in 2000 and then enrolled at highly ranked Snow College in the fall of 2001. After redshirting his first year at Snow College, Haines embarked on a two-year mission to Hungary in 2002 before returning to Snow College. Haines was named the team MVP for coach Steve Coburn at Snow, the school that recent-

ly produced defensive end C.J. Ah You of Oklahoma and offensive tackle Taitusi Lutui of Southern Cal, in leading his team to a 10-2 record and a victory in the Top of the Mountains Bowl, where Snow College defeated Butler (Kan.), 17-14, at Rice-Eccles Stadium. Snow College finished 2005 with a No. 7 national ranking. Haines also helped Snow College to a Top of the Mountain Bowl win in 2004. Haines was a 2005 All-Western States Football League first-team honoree. Haines was named a third-team Junior College Wire All-American in 2005. College Football News ranks Haines as the 20th-best junior college offensive lineman in the country. Haines, the son of Barbara and Keith Haines, was born on March 3, 1983.

WHY VICTORY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I like the people. The coaches really care about people and you can tell the whole program is committed to winning and getting things done. It is a sign of a good program I think. I know I need to get stronger and put on more weight."



RICKY HENRY

Offensive Line Omaha, Neb. (Burke)

Height: 6-3 Weight: 280 40-yard dash: 5.2

BIO: Ricky Henry, a 6-3, 280-pound offensive lineman, is one of four in-state players to sign with Nebraska and was NU's first commitment in the 2006 class, pledging to be a Husker in April of 2005. Henry ranks

as the seventh-best offensive center prospect in the nation, according to the Rivals.com, while also ranking as the No. 2 overall prospect in the state of Nebraska. Henry was a first-team all-state selection as a junior and a senior. Playing defensive line for coach Jack Oholendt's Omaha Burke Bulldogs, Henry logged 84 total tackles as a senior, including 27 tackles for losses and three sacks. He had 107 total tackles as a junior, including 12 tackles for losses and 10 sacks. Henry chose Nebraska after also receiving offers from Kansas and Kansas State and garnering interest from Iowa. Henry is the first scholarship recruit from Burke High School since Adam Julch and Aaron Wills in 1995. Henry was the Class A state runner-up as a heavyweight wrestler as a junior. Henry, the son of Maria Henry, was born on

July 27, 1987.

WHY RICKY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "The fans are one of the things that hooked me on Nebraska. They're great. I like the coaches down there a lot, too, especially offensive line coach Dennis Wagner."

BILL CALLAHAN: "Ricky Henry, no question in my mind, is one of the better offensive linemen, not only in-state, maybe one of the best offensive linemen in the country. His temperament, his attitude, his ability to finish plays and be physical really caught our attention. When we turned on the film last spring, it was a joke. And he rolled a lot of guys up. It was effortless in a lot of respects, and it was really an easy decision for us to offer him a scholarship."

OMAHA BURKE COACH JACK OHOLENDT: "Ricky is one of the best lineman prospects I have ever coached. I coached Dave Rimington during his high school career at Omaha South, and Ricky is a better looking prospect at this stage in his career than Dave was."



WILL HENRY

Wide Receiver El Paso, Texas (J.M. Hanks)
Height: 6-5 Weight: 195 40-yard dash: 4.5

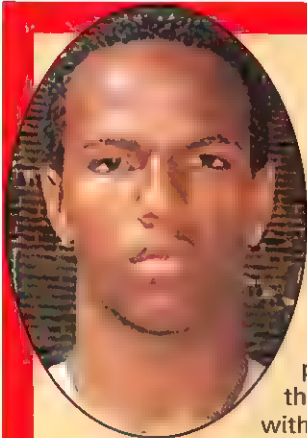
BIO: Will Henry adds impressive size and speed to the wide receiver position for Nebraska. The tallest receiver to sign with the class, Henry stands 6-foot-5, weighs in at 195 pounds and runs a 4.5-second 40-yard dash. Henry matches Wilson

Thomas (1998) as the tallest receivers to sign with the Huskers since at least 1974. Henry chose Nebraska after also receiving offers from Missouri, New Mexico State and UTEP. As a junior at J.M. Hanks High School, Henry caught 16 passes for 273 yards and three touchdowns. Henry enjoyed a breakout season as a senior, totaling 52 receptions for 917 yards and 12 touchdowns, while earning Class 5A first-team All-State honors from TexasHSFootball.com. Playing defense as a junior, Henry recorded 35 total tackles and intercepted two passes. Henry is ranked among the SuperPrep Texas Top 102. Henry also runs track for Hanks. Henry, the

son of William and Vernetta Henry, was born on Dec. 10, 1987.

WHY WILL CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I was impressed that the academics are just as prestigious as the football program, which is pretty amazing. And then when you see the facilities that are being built and you realize you have the chance to play for great coaches who have as much NFL experience as they have, it's pretty amazing. I think it is a perfect opportunity to play for a great team and be part of something great. I really like the coaches. The coaching staff is amazing."

J.M. HANKS COACH JEFF CLEVELAND: "Will listens to what he's told to do, and he will do it. He's not a guy who thinks he's got the world figured out. The word I like to use is that he's got a lot of character. He'll only get bigger and faster. And as he matures, that size is going to be such a big factor for him."



MENELIK HOLT

Wide Receiver San Diego, Calif. (St. Augustine)
Height: 6-4 Weight: 215 40-yard dash: 4.78

BIO: Wide receiver Menelik Holt was one of the Huskers' first commitments in the 2006 recruiting class, giving his pledge last summer. Holt gives the Huskers yet another big target with speed to plug into the passing game. Holt hails from St. Augustine

High School in San Diego, the same school as current Husker place-kicker Jordan Congdon. He ranks as the 44th-best wide receiver in the nation, according to Rivals.com. Holt earned first-team all-league honors as a junior, catching 42 passes for 726 yards and 12 touchdowns, and also adding an interception return for a touchdown. As a senior, he caught 62 passes for a league-leading 790 yards and 13 touchdowns. On defense, Holt recorded 17 tackles, including a league-leading 4.5 sacks, one forced fumble and one interception. He also played special teams, returning seven kickoffs for 127 yards. As a senior, Holt earned first-team Medium School all-state honors, as his team won the CIF 2005 Division III title. Holt also played center for the St. Augustine basketball team as

a junior, averaging 10 points and 16 rebounds a game, while setting the school record for rebounds in a playoff game with 22. He has given up basketball as a senior to focus on football. Holt, the son of Mary Holt and Joseph Holt, was born on Aug. 19, 1988.

WHY MENELIK CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I'm pretty good friends with Jordan Congdon. He loves it at Nebraska, and I trust him and his family a lot. The Congdons and us are all about character, and the coaches and fans at Nebraska have it."

BILL CALLAHAN: "We targeted him early, and had him in here early for the spring game, and that had a dramatic effect on his decision to come here. He's another big, physical receiver who provides you with a mismatch."

ST. AUGUSTINE COACH JERRY RALPH: "Menelik is unreal. He has to be among the top three wide receivers on the west coast. Menelik will go after and get the football. He's so strong that he will out-muscle defensive backs to get the ball."

SETH JENSEN

Defensive Tackle Fort Morgan, Colo.

Height: 6-3 Weight: 275 40-yard dash: 4.9



BIO: Defensive tackle Seth Jensen was another early commitment, pledging in June of 2005. He has the versatility to play either defensive tackle or base defensive end. Jensen ranks as the 36th-best defensive tackle prospect in the nation, according to Rivals.com and the fourth-best prospect in the state of Colorado. Playing for coach Rick Kahl at Fort Morgan, he recorded 70 tackles in earning first-team all-conference and honorable-mention all-state honors as a junior. As a senior, Jensen recorded 89 total tackles, including 4.5 sacks, seven tackles for losses and two fumble recoveries. Jensen also was named to the Denver Post's "Best of the Best" team, making the offensive line in Class 3A. During the recruiting process, Jensen only visited Nebraska, but also received offers from Oklahoma, UCLA, Colorado, Iowa State, Kansas State, Colorado State and Wyoming. Jensen also plays basketball for Fort Morgan, and played baseball early on in his high school career. Jensen, the son of Dean and Jane

Jensen, was born on Sept. 1, 1987.

WHY SETH CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I feel real comfortable with coach (John) Blake and coach (Bill) Callahan. They just show so much support and confidence in me. Coach Blake told me that he thinks I have a chance to come in and play as a freshman. I don't know if I'll be ready to do that or not, but I'm going to try and contribute the best I can. They just really make you feel like you're part of the family."

BILL CALLAHAN: "He's got a great attitude. He's a guy that is physical and relentless in his effort. And again, you want to put a guy like him in a position where you can really utilize his strength. That's the main thing we're looking for is his run-stopping ability. His ability to separate the play, that's where he shows up. He's got a good motor."

FORT MORGAN COACH RICK KAHL: "He's a great young man who's really done things on defense that have impressed me. He plays sideline-to-sideline and has excellent hands and quickness."

BRANDON JOHNSON

Defensive Tackle Chicago, Ill. (Marshall/Compton, Calif., CC)

Height: 6-3 Weight: 312 40-yard dash: 4.8



BIO: Brandon Johnson comes to Nebraska after a productive season at Compton (Calif.) Community College, the same school as current Husker Oia Dagunduro. He ranks as the 84th-best junior college prospect, according to Rivals.com. Johnson is an athletic and physically developed lineman who should immediately enter the Huskers' rotation at defensive tackle. As a freshman, the Chicago native played for NAIA school Graceland University in Lamoni, Ill., and totaled 51 tackles and eight sacks before transferring to Compton for his sophomore season. As a sophomore playing for coach Cornell Ward at Compton, Johnson recorded 79 tackles, including 10 sacks and 15 tackles for losses, earning first-team All-Western State Conference Southern Division honors. Johnson also received offers from Arizona, Arizona State, Michigan State, Minnesota, Oregon and Washington. College Football News ranks Johnson as the 54th-best junior college

prospect in the country and the eighth-best junior college defensive tackle in the nation. He attended high school at Marshall High School in Chicago. Johnson was born on Sept. 2, 1985.

WHY BRANDON CHOSE NEBRASKA: "A big reason that I chose Nebraska was the atmosphere I experienced in Lincoln when I went to their game against Texas Tech. I liked the team unity and the fans. The team sticks together around everything. They came back in that game, and never gave up. I liked that about them."

BILL CALLAHAN: "I think he's an outstanding football player. He has a very square, thick, wide body. He has the type of body you look for to play the inside defensive tackle position, especially in early down situations. He does have pass rushing ability as well and possesses great flexibility and speed."

COMPTON COACH ANGELO JACKSON: "He's really going to be a steal."



ANDRE JONES

Defensive Back Ft. Walton Beach, Fla. (Choctawatchee/Kentucky/Fresno CC) Height: 6-0 Weight: 192 40-yard dash: 4.4

BIO: Andre Jones earned a five-star rating from Rivals.com and ranks as the No. 4 junior college prospect, regardless of position. Jones, who originally hails from Choctawatchee High School in Fort Walton Beach, Fla., recorded 50 tackles and three interceptions as a senior in high school, following up a junior campaign in which he tallied 44 tackles and four interceptions. Originally committing to Kentucky out of high school, Jones played in three games for the Wildcats in 2003 before suffering a season-ending leg injury. Jones was awarded a medical redshirt season for 2003, and transferred to Fresno City (Calif.) College to start the 2004 season. As a freshman for coach Tony Caviglia at Fresno, Jones recorded 50 tackles and five interceptions. As a sophomore, he totaled 54 tackles and two interceptions, along with 13 pass breakups. Jones also added 15 kickoff returns for 392 yards. College Football News ranks Jones as the top junior college cornerback in the nation. Jones selected Nebraska over Southern

Cal, Oregon, Oregon State, Washington, Washington State, Arkansas and Utah. Jones, the son of Jerilin Jones, was born on Aug. 16, 1983.

WHY ANDRE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I really feel needed and wanted at Nebraska. A lot of teams say they want you, but even the players at Nebraska said they needed and wanted me, and that is a great feeling. I don't feel that I'd be just another athlete here (Nebraska), but I'd have a career here as a teammate and a student-athlete."

BILL CALLAHAN: "He's going to be very similar to what Zack Bowman did last year. He's a guy that can help in the corner rotation and also help in the sub packages. We play people early like Louisiana Tech that use a lot of no-back offenses, so we've got to be ready, and that's easily a position he'll come into."

FRESNO CITY COACH TONY CAVIGLIA: "Andre's ability to bait receivers is really uncanny. He can handle contact. The physical adjustment at Nebraska is not going to be a problem."



D.J. JONES

Offensive Line Omaha, Neb. (Central) Height: 6-5 Weight: 300 40-yard dash: 5.1

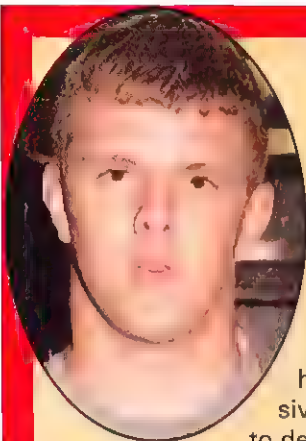
BIO: One of four in-state commitments for Nebraska this year, Jones is the latest in a long line of outstanding Omaha Central High School prospects. His commitment was the second of the Huskers' 2006 class, coming in April of last year. Jones is a physically-gifted lineman with outstanding size who is slated to play the left tackle position on offense. He ranks as the 16th-best offensive tackle in the nation, according to Rivals.com, and is rated as the top prospect in the state of Nebraska. Jones chose Nebraska over Iowa State, Kansas and Houston. He earned first-team all-state honors as a senior playing for coach Joe McMenamin at Omaha Central after earning honorable-mention honors as a junior. He was named to the 2005 Lincoln Journal Star Super-State team and the Omaha World-Herald All-Nebraska team. College Football News ranks Jones as the 31st-best offensive line prospect in the country. Jones is Nebraska's fourth signee from Omaha Central High School in the

past five years. Other Omaha Central graduates on NU's 2006 roster include Cortney Grixby, and Chris LeFlore. Jones, the son of Bridget Brown and David Jones Sr., was born on May 8, 1988.

WHY D.J. CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I feel that coach (Bill) Callahan is making things happen there. The Colorado game showed me that. I'm positive that coach Callahan will take the Huskers back to the level that they have been in past years."

BILL CALLAHAN: "D.J. Jones is an outstanding player. His ability and his potential flashed significantly during our camps. He's got a solid family background, good character, great personal work ethic and we're excited about adding him to the mix. The sky is the limit for D.J."

CENTRAL COACH JOE MCMENAMIN: "D.J. has great feet and upside for a player his size. He is one of the better lineman prospects to come through our program."



BEN MARTIN

Defensive End Lincoln, Neb. (Southwest)
Height: 6-4 Weight: 265 40-yard dash: 4.8

BIO: Ben Martin is a versatile two-way lineman who could end up on either side of the ball for the Huskers. Though he'll begin his career as a defensive end, he also has the potential to develop into an offensive lineman down the road. The 6-4, 265-pound

Martin helped coach Mark King's Silver Hawks to an undefeated regular season record and a runner-up finish to Millard North for the Class A State Championship. He was named to the 2005 Lincoln Journal Star Super-State team and the Omaha World-Herald All-Nebraska team. Martin was rated as the sixth-best prospect in the state of Nebraska by Rivals.com. He chose the Huskers after also receiving interest from Colorado State, Iowa State, Kansas State, Kansas, Wyoming and Ohio. Martin was an all-city selection as a junior, recording 63 tackles and six sacks. As a senior, he earned first-team all-state honors, tallying 66 tackles and six tackles for losses.

Martin, the son of Michael and Viann Martin, was born on April 6, 1988.

WHY BEN CHOSE NEBRASKA: "When Nebraska offered me, committing seemed like the best thing to do. It will be fun to be part of the tradition in Lincoln."

BILL CALLAHAN: "He's a guy that caught our eye during the course of the year. He came out and got better and he's getting bigger. He's a parallel of a young player that has a lot of potential but not quite the size yet. He's a great student. He has a great family and a great loyalty toward Nebraska. He's a player that potentially can emerge as he progresses through his years."

SOUTHWEST COACH MARK KING: "He's a strong kid and a very hard worker. He's also the guy with the lowest pads. If you watch the guys who play on Sunday, their pads are always low."



MIKE McNEILL

Tight End Kirkwood, Mo.
Height: 6-4 Weight: 215 40-yard dash: 4.65

BIO: Mike McNeill is one of two Missouri prospects in Nebraska's 2006 class and gives the Huskers a speedy tight end prospect who can stretch defenses vertically in the mold of current Nebraska tight end Matt Herian. At 6-4 and 215 pounds,

McNeill runs a 4.65 40-yard dash. McNeill played for coach Larry Frost at Kirkwood High School and earned first-team Class 6A All-State honors in both his junior and senior seasons. He caught 20 passes for 345 yards and five touchdowns as a sophomore, had 44 catches for 806 yards and six touchdowns as a junior, and caught 33 passes for 665 yards and four touchdowns in 2005. McNeill is ranked as the 37th-best tight end prospect in the nation, according to Rivals.com, and the 11th-best player in the state of Missouri. McNeill is ranked No. 19 on the SuperPrep Midlands Top 77. He chose Nebraska over Colorado, Wisconsin, Missouri, Texas Tech, Kansas, Indiana

and Northwestern. McNeill, the son of Allen and Sally McNeill, was born on March 7, 1988.

WHY MIKE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I think the main thing is the 'home' feeling I get from the coaches. I mean, when I took my official visit to Nebraska, we went over to coach (Kevin) Cosgrove's house, and the feeling was almost like being at home. He told me while we were there that I could go over there anytime for anything, and that's the kind of closeness with coaches that I'm looking for."

BILL CALLAHAN: "Mike is a terrific young man. He makes terrific plays with his hands. His ability to make the big play after the catch is so noticeable when you watch his film. He's very athletic. He pulls through a lot of tackles because of his strength."

KIRKWOOD COACH LARRY FROST: "He has the ability to play down there right away. He just needs to get a little bit stronger in the off-season."

CARL NICKS

Offensive Line Salinas, Calif. (N. Salinas/New Mexico St./Hartnell JC) Height: 6-5 Weight: 325 40-yard dash: 5.0



BIO: Carl Nicks is a big, athletic tackle from Hartnell Junior College who should immediately contend for playing time in the fall. He received a four-star rating from Rivals.com, ranking as the No. 35 overall junior college prospect. After graduating from North Salinas High School in Salinas, Calif., in 2003, Nicks attended New Mexico State, playing for then head coach Tony Samuel, a former Husker player and assistant coach. At NMSU, he started his career as a defensive tackle and switched to the offensive side, before transferring back to Salinas to attend Hartnell Junior College. As a sophomore, Nicks earned 2005 California Community College Football Coaches Association first-team All-American honors and Region II first-team All-California honors as an offensive lineman playing for coach Larry Souza. Nicks helped lead Hartnell to a 7-4 record and a conference championship. College Football News ranks Nicks as the sixth-best junior college offensive lineman in the country and the 25th-best junior college prospect in the nation. Nicks chose the Huskers after also receiving

offers from California, Washington, Wisconsin and Louisville. He also throws the shot put and discus for Hartnell. Nicks has a wife, Bridget, and a 2-year-old daughter, Serena. He will have two seasons to play two at Nebraska. Nicks, the son of Carl Nicks Sr., was born on March 5, 1983.

WHY CARL CHOSE NEBRASKA: "To tell you the truth, it was their academic support system. It's awesome. The coaches aren't too bad themselves, and the players are like a big family over there. The facilities are top of the line quality, and everything there just seems top of the line. It's like nothing I've ever seen."

BILL CALLAHAN: "The guy just flashes all over the film. He does a great job of pulling and getting down field and finishing his blocks. He has an incredible amount of talent. He's a size guy and a big, square, physical player. He's just got a tremendous amount of potential."

HARTNELL COACH LARRY SOUZA: "He's strong, quick and very athletic with great feet. He's definitely legit."

MAURICE PURIFY

Wide Receiver Eureka, Calif. (San Francisco CC) Height: 6-4 Weight: 210 40-yard dash: 4.45



BIO: Maurice Purify was a standout wide receiver last season for the City College of San Francisco and distinguished himself as perhaps the most dominant receiver in the junior college ranks. Purify, originally from Eureka (Calif.) High School, earned 2005 California Community College Football Coaches Association first-team All-America honors and Region I first-team All-California honors at wide receiver in helping lead coach George Rush's City College squad to a 10-2 season that ended with a 41-38 loss in the junior college state championship game, a game in which Purify earned offensive MVP honors. Purify ranks as the 17th-best junior college prospect in the nation, according to Rivals.com. As a freshman, he had 24 receptions for 444 yards and 11 touchdowns. As a sophomore, he recorded an impressive 68 catches for 1,318 yards and 19 touchdowns. He chose Nebraska after also receiving offers from Arizona, Kentucky, Oregon State and Washington. Purify is an uncle of former Colorado

tailback Bobby Purify. The son of Mary Purify-Skillman, he was born on Jan. 17, 1986.

WHY MAURICE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "At first, I wanted to stay closer to home, but Nebraska made me feel like I was part of a family. I went to see (NU coach) Ted Gilmore's family when I went on my official visit to Lincoln, and they were real nice to me. It made me feel real nice to be there."

BILL CALLAHAN: "You look at Maurice Purify and what he's done at San Francisco City College. There's a big playmaker right there, whether it's in the red zone, on third down, on a normal down, he's a guy who can make plays and elevate, and really help your offense come alive in situations where you may have a smaller guy."

SAN FRANCISCO CITY COLLEGE ASSISTANT JOHN BALANO: "I would be greatly, greatly surprised if we aren't paying to see this kid play on Sundays. The kid is tall with deceptive speed and great hands. He can do it all."



MIKE SMITH

Defensive End Las Vegas, Nev. (Palo Verde)
Height: 6-6 Weight: 260 40-yard dash: 4.75

BIO: Mike Smith, the first Nebraska scholarship recruit from Nevada since Albert Lewis Jr. in 1982, is another versatile lineman who's capable of playing on either side of the football. He will start his career at the base defensive end position but has the size and feet to play offensive tackle as well. Smith ranks as the 25th-best weakside defensive end prospect in the nation, according to Rivals.com, and the fifth best player in the state of Nevada. As a junior at Palo Verde High School in Las Vegas, Smith recorded 71 tackles and state-leading 17 sacks in leading coach Darwin Rost's Palo Verde squad to a 14-0 record and the 2004 Southern 4A Title. He also hauled in six catches for 122 yards in earning second-team all-state honors. As a senior, Smith recorded 56 tackles and five sacks in earning first-team all-state honors. As a tight end, he added eight receptions for 102 yards and one touchdown. Smith is

ranked on the SuperPrep All-Far West team. He's a three-sport star for Palo Verde, playing basketball and baseball as well as football. Smith earned second-team all-state honors as a first baseman as a junior. He chose Nebraska over Oregon, Oregon State and UNLV. Smith, the son of Michael and Pattie Smith, was born on March 17, 1988.

WHY MIKE CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I saw enough on my visit to commit. I knew the football was always good there, but it was the academics and the way the whole place just fit me. I really liked it."

BILL CALLAHAN: "Mike was one of the premiere players in Las Vegas this year. His ability to come off the edge and rush the passer is what caught our eye. We're happy to have a player of his caliber here."

PALO VERDE COACH DARWIN ROST: "Mike is a real hard-nosed kid with a great work ethic. He plays the game very aggressively."



RICKY THENARSE

Defensive Back Los Angeles, Calif. (Jordan)
Height: 6-0 Weight: 185 40-yard dash: 4.48

BIO: The final commitment of Nebraska's 2006 recruiting class, Ricky Thenarse is a speedy and physical defensive back who's capable of playing anywhere in the secondary.

Thenarse, who runs a 4.48-second 40-yard dash, received a four-star rating from Rivals.com, ranking as the 15th-best athlete prospect in the nation and being included on the Rivals250 list. Rivals.com also ranks Thenarse as the No. 18 prospect in California. As a junior playing for coach Elijah Asante at Jordan High School in Los Angeles, Thenarse ran for 1,234 yards on 130 carries, scoring 12 touchdowns and earning first-team all-league honors. Thenarse also had 15 catches for 307 yards and four touchdowns, and added 20 tackles, three sacks and three interceptions. As a senior, he carried the ball 112 times for 1,344 yards and 10 touchdowns, caught 19 passes for 628 yards and five touchdowns, returned 11 punts for 231 yards and a touchdown and returned 14 kickoffs for 300 yards in

earning first-team all-city and all-state honors. Defensively, Thenarse had 153 tackles and one interception as a senior. Thenarse chose Nebraska over USC, UCLA, California, Colorado, Fresno State, Oregon and Washington. Thenarse, the son of Kathy Thenarse and Ricky Thenarse Sr., was born on Aug. 2, 1988.

WHY RICKY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "The fans and the coaches are great. Plus, Nebraska had a lot of their secondary leave this past year, so I have a chance to go up there and start. The city of Lincoln is cool, too. It's a nice change of pace from Los Angeles."

BILL CALLAHAN: "Ricky Thenarse is just a physical, physical football player that can come downhill and blow up ball carriers. So he's going to be in a position somewhere in that back area to help us."

JORDAN COACH ELIJAH ASANTE: "Ricky never came off the field for us. I think he's the best all-around football player in the country."



ANTHONY WEST

Defensive Back San Diego, Calif. (Point Loma)
Height: 6-0 Weight: 195 40-yard dash: 4.56

BIO: Anthony West, one of eight California commits to join the Nebraska class of 2006, is a hard-hitting defensive back from Point Loma High School in San Diego. He has the size and mentality to play either safety position but also has the speed to play cornerback. As a junior, West rushed for 449 yards on 67 carries, scoring seven touchdowns. He also added 13 tackles on defense. As a senior, West rushed for 1,320 yards and 14 touchdowns on 174 carries, and had 17 receptions for 341 yards and four touchdowns. He also tallied 36 tackles on defense in helping coach Mike Hastings' Point Loma squad finish runner-up in the 2005 CIF Division III championship to St. Augustine High School and fellow Nebraska recruit Menelik Holt. West, who runs a 4.56 second 40-yard dash, also received recruiting interest from UCLA, Texas Tech, San Diego State and Utah. West, the son of Robert and Marguerite West,

was born on March 29, 1988.

WHY ANTHONY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I camped at Nebraska last summer, and when I went out there I just liked everything. It was the coaches, the facilities and the academics. It was all of that put together."

BILL CALLAHAN: "This guy was in our camp and he flashed a lot of potential and ran well. He's versatile and has got great feet and a great burst. He has all of the tools. He has all of the skills you look for in a defensive back but he could play on the offensive side of the ball for us as well."

POINT LOMA COACH MIKE HASTINGS: "I've had a lot of kids sign Division I, but I've never seen the thoroughness in recruiting that Nebraska showed in recruiting Anthony. As a person, there's none better than Anthony. He's the type of kid that Nebraska is going to love."



KEITH WILLIAMS

Offensive Line Florissant, Mo. (McCluer North)
Height: 6-5 Weight: 310 40-yard dash: 5.4

BIO: Offensive lineman Keith Williams has the ability to play a number of different positions on the Husker offensive line. He ranks as the 55th-best offensive tackle prospect in the nation, according to Rivals.com, and the No. 13 prospect in Missouri. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch ranked Williams the top offensive lineman in its metro area. As a junior, Williams recorded 51 total tackles, including five tackles for losses and one sack, in earning first-team all-conference honors on defense and first-team all-metro and all-state honors as an offensive lineman. As a senior, he recorded 24 tackles, including one sack and one fumble recovery and earned first-team Class 5A All-State honors. Williams helped lead coach Jim Schottmueller's McCluer North squad to back-to-back Missouri Class 5A championship game appearances. He also received offers from Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Michigan State and

Missouri. Williams, the son of Marnetta Jackson and Keith Williams Sr., was born on April 8, 1988.

WHY KEITH CHOSE NEBRASKA: "It's Nebraska, you know? It's just a special, special place. The academics are probably what turned my head the most. I was impressed with the 93 percent graduation rate. That was big."

BILL CALLAHAN: "Keith is 310 pounds and he looks like he's 280. He's just a big, square long-armed guy that has all the potential in the world to be a great player."

MCCLUER NORTH COACH JIM SCHOTTMUELLER: "Physically, you'll be impressed when you see him. He looks like a college player already. When people saw him, they were amazed he was only 17 years old. He's better, at this stage, than Barrett Brooks (Pittsburgh Steelers tackle) who played here. He's stronger and quicker."

KENNY WILSON

Running Back Liberal, Kan. (Butler, Kan., CC)

Height: 6-0 Weight: 220 40-yard dash: 4.4



BIO: Running back Kenny Wilson is another Butler County Community College recruit, who joins Zac Taylor, Frantz Hardy and Justin Tomerlin as former Butler players to sign with the Huskers. The 6-0, 220-pound Wilson runs a 4.4-second 40-yard dash and ranks as the eighth-best junior college prospect in the nation and the top junior college running back, according to Rivals.com. At Liberal (Kan.) High School, Wilson rushed for 1,499 yards and 18 touchdowns on 199 carries as a junior, and gained 1,189 yards and 16 touchdowns on 211 carries as a senior. Wilson also excelled on the track. He was a state champion in the 100-meter and 200-meter dashes and still holds the school record in those events. As a freshman playing for coaches Troy Morrell and Aaron Flores at Butler, Wilson rushed for 967 yards and 13 touchdowns on 147 carries in helping the school to the 2004 Junior College National Championship game. As a sophomore, Wilson gained 1,292 yards and scored 14 touchdowns on 126 carries

in earning NJCAA and JC Gridwire first-team All-America honors. Wilson chose Nebraska over Florida, Tennessee and Oklahoma State. Wilson also runs track at Butler. Wilson, the son of Eddie Mae Eatmon, was born on July 2, 1986.

WHY KENNY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "I loved it when I went there. I felt like I was home. Between the players, the coaches, the graduation rate, the team success, I just felt like I was one of them. It's a strong program, and I'm excited to get up there."

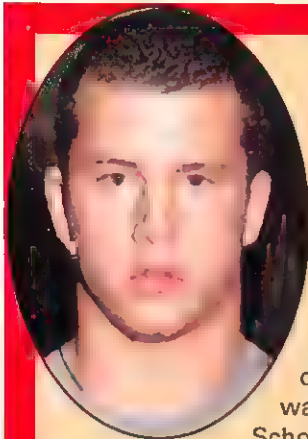
BILL CALLAHAN: "Kenny Wilson is a great football player. He's got great speed, good hands; I like everything about Kenny Wilson. I couldn't be more pleased to have him as a part of this football team. He's shown the ability to do a lot of different things with the ball, so he'll come in here and compete for a spot."

BUTLER COUNTY COACH TROY MORRELL: "Kenny is an extremely talented football player and a great person to go along with it. He'll do whatever it takes to get the job done."

COREY YOUNG

Defensive Back Omaha, Neb. (Millard North)

Height: 6-0 Weight: 190 40-yard dash: 4.45



BIO: Corey Young is a speedy (4.45-second 40-yard dash) safety prospect with good size who joins the Huskers after a distinguished career as a two-way player at Millard North High School in Omaha. He is currently recovering from ACL reconstruction and is likely to redshirt the 2005 season. Young, who transferred from Millard South to Millard North this past season, helped lead coach Fred Petito's Mustangs to the Class A state championship, rushing for 1,670 yards and 22 touchdowns on 126 attempts and catching two passes for 104 yards and one touchdown and earning first-team all-state honors. He was named to the 2005 Lincoln Journal Star Super-State team and the Omaha World-Herald All-Nebraska team. Young also participates in track. He ranks as the 58th-best safety in the nation, according to Rivals.com, and ranks as the No. 4 player in the state of Nebraska. Young chose the Huskers over

Iowa State and Colorado State. Young, the son of Jan Hoffman-Jones and stepfather Kevin Jones, was born on Sept. 19, 1987.

WHY COREY CHOSE NEBRASKA: "The relationship and comfort that I felt with the coaches was the biggest thing. They, by far, showed me the most love of any of the coaching staffs I talked to."

BILL CALLAHAN: "Corey is a guy that caught our eye and really emerged. You put him on film, and you say to yourself 'Boy, if this guy was anywhere else in the country, you would recruit him just as hard.' He flashed that well as we watched him on film. He's got good play ability. He can slash, he can curve, he has good hands, and he's a player that can do it all. So we're excited about his talent."

MILLARD NORTH COACH FRED PETITO: "Cory makes violent cuts. He'll remind you a bit of (ex-Mustang) Eric Crouch. He's that explosive."



Offensive lineman Carl Nicks is one of eight junior college recruits in the 2006 class.

2006 Class Fills Needs

NU's focus on linemen, wide receivers, defensive backs

By Doug Horwich

Nebraska went into the 2006 recruiting period with a number of needs that had to be addressed and an overriding agenda that emphasized the addition of size, strength and speed to the roster.

Among head coach Bill Callahan's primary objectives were to replenish the team's depth on both the offensive and defensive lines, to bolster the Huskers' wide receiver corps with big, physical athletes and to restock the secondary with speed and a physical mindset.

It should therefore come as no surprise that 50 percent of Nebraska's 2006 recruiting class is made up of offensive and defensive linemen, with 25 percent

comprised of defensive backs and another 20 percent made up of wide receivers.

Last year's struggles at the offensive tackle positions prompted the Husker staff to sign two junior college tackles in this class — juniors Carl Nicks and Victory Haines. Three high school tackles were also signed, however, in Cruz Barrett, D.J. Jones and Keith Williams. All three are capable of playing the offensive tackle position, and defensive end recruit Mike Smith also has the frame and quick feet to move to tackle if necessary.

The junior college tackles will be expected to compete for starting positions right away, and Haines was able to enroll at mid-term, which means that he will participate fully in winter conditioning and spring football.

Nicks may have been the most talent-

RIVALS.COM **2006** **TEAM** **RANKINGS**

Top 25

School	Points
1. Southern Cal	3,018
2. Florida	2,901
3. Florida State	2,703
4. Georgia	2,371
5. Texas	2,283
6. Penn State	2,241
7. LSU	2,238
8. Notre Dame	2,190
9. Oklahoma	2,180
10. Auburn	2,148
11. Alabama	2,127
12. Ohio State	2,000
13. Michigan	1,974
14. Miami, Fla.	1,785
15. Clemson	1,741
16. Ole Miss	1,731
17. UCLA	1,544
18. Arizona	1,530
19. California	1,512
20. Nebraska	1,432
21. Pittsburgh	1,412
22. Oklahoma St.	1,330
23. Tennessee	1,245
24. South Carolina	1,236
25. Texas A&M	1,203

Other Big 12

26. Texas Tech	1,194
39. Kansas	762
41. Kansas State	675
47. Missouri	564
48. Colorado	520
63. Iowa State	285
68. Baylor	226

ed offensive tackle in the junior college ranks last year and has the size and athletic ability to be an outstanding Div. I left tackle. The presence of Nicks and Haines will likely allow the Husker staff to redshirt all of the high school tackle recruits.

At the center position, the Huskers added Omaha Burke standout Ricky Henry and 2005 grayshirt Jacob Hickman. Hickman is slated to redshirt the 2006 season, while Henry has yet to qualify academically and may have to attend a junior college before heading to Lincoln.

On the defensive line, the Husker staff was not able to add an additional defensive tackle to the class despite a late effort to do so. However, they still managed to sign two interior line prospects in junior college transfer Brandon Johnson and high school prospect Seth Jensen.

Johnson is a quick and athletic tackle prospect from the same college that produced Husker senior tackle Ola Dagunduro, and their junior college coach has stated that Johnson is the more athletic of the two. He should immediately earn playing time in the four-man rotation at the tackle spots.

Jensen is capable of playing either base end or defensive tackle, and could potentially start at end and move inside once he gains size and strength. Given that he's the only defensive lineman Nebraska signed who's capable of playing inside, that's probably where his future lies.

At defensive end, Nebraska signed four players capable of playing at least one of the two defensive end positions. At the open-side end spot, Colorado native Pierre Allen has the body type to be the pass rusher the Huskers want at the position. If he doesn't work out at defensive end, he's also very capable of lining up on offense as a tight end.

At the base end position currently manned by Adam Carriker, the Huskers added three high school prospects in the 2006 class who will potentially get a first look there. In addition to Jensen, Smith and Lincoln Southeast product Ben Martin also have a chance to end up there.

However, with two other young players already at the position in 2004 recruit Ty Steinkuhler and 2005 recruit Zach Potter, it's doubtful that

RECRUITING NOTES

California Is Golden

By Rick Shaw

Nebbraska coaches scoured the country for talented safety prospects in their recruiting class of 2006. They found what they were looking for over 1,000 miles west, in the state of California.

● Major Culbert, a 5-foot-11, 187-pound athlete out of Narbonne High School in Harbor City, Calif., announced his decision to attend Nebraska in late January. After starring on both sides of the ball in high school, Culbert said he'd likely find a home as a safety at Nebraska.

"Nebraska wants me to come in and play safety," Culbert said, "but I can also play running back or cornerback. I'll play wherever they need me."

Culbert earned all-conference honors on both sides of the line of scrimmage in 2005. As a running back, he rushed for 1,955 yards on 249 carries. On defense, he collected 56 tackles and seven sacks.

Rated the No. 39 prospect in California by Rivals.com, Culbert chose Nebraska over offers from Oregon, Washington, UCLA, San Diego State, Fresno State and UNLV.

"Ours is the toughest leagues in the city, and Major ran right through it," Narbonne coach Manuel Douglas said. "Most schools were recruiting him as a defensive back, but he could be one heck of a running back, too."

● Another Los Angeles area athlete, Ricky Thenarse, has the versatility to play a number of different positions at Nebraska, though he'll likely get his first opportunity at safety.

The 6-1, 180-pound athlete out of Los Angeles Jordan rarely came off the field as a senior in 2005. He rushed for 1,344 yards and 10 touchdowns as a running back and added 628 yards receiving for another five scores. He averaged more than 20 yards per punt and kick return and racked up 153 tackles as a defensive back. He also punted, was a holder on extra points and played quarterback occasionally.

"Ricky never came off the field for us," Jordan coach Elijah Asante said. "I think he's the best all-around football player in the country."

Thenarse, rated the No. 15 prospect in the state by Rivals.com, chose the Huskers over offers from Washington, Oregon, Fresno State and Colorado. The speedy athlete (4.48-second 40-yard dash) from L.A., said that the opportunity to play for the Big Red was too good to pass up.

"Nebraska has been my 'dream school' for a long time," Thenarse said. "It's a good fit for me."

● Anthony West, a 6-0, 195-pound athlete from San Diego Point Loma will also get a chance to make his presence felt in the secondary. A 1,300-yard rusher as a senior, the fleet-footed West (4.37 40) chose the Huskers over scholarship offers from Texas Tech and Cal.

"One of the things I noted this season for Nebraska is how many freshmen that they played," West said. "They have a real young team, and they are up and coming. I think Nebraska has a real good future."

● With the three talented athletes from California and Corey Young, a 6-0, 194-pound safety from Millard North High School in Omaha, Neb., the Huskers were able to add a substantial amount of depth to a position that looked paper-thin heading into 2006. ■

even two of the three will actually end up at base end. Jensen's future may be on the interior line, and Martin could very easily develop into an offensive guard.

At the wide receiver spots, Nebraska added two junior college transfers in Maurice Purify and Tyrell Spain, and two high school prospects in Menelik Holt and Will Henry. All four players feature an impressive combination of size and speed and have the big bodies that the staff actively pursued at the position this year.

Having been victimized by receivers of this type for years in the Big 12 with players like Missouri's Justin Gage and Texas' Roy Williams, the Huskers are now in a position to turn the tables on their conference rivals.

Spain is actually a player who signed with Nebraska's 2005 recruiting class but failed to qualify academically. Only short one class, he spent the remainder of 2005 at Lincoln Southeast Community College and transferred at midterm.

In Purify, the Huskers may have signed the top wide receiver in the

junior college ranks last year, and he brings a combination of size and speed that Nebraska really didn't have on its roster last season.

Holt was a player who was targeted extremely early by the Husker staff, after they had become well aware of him through their recruitment of his 2005 teammate, place-kicker Jordan Congdon. Holt is another big receiver with speed who has a chance to play as a true freshman.

The final receiver signed in Nebraska's 2006 class was El Paso, Texas, standout Henry. At 6-5 and 195 pounds, Henry also possesses impressive speed, and he has the potential to develop into a truly intimidating presence on the field.

The Husker also added five defensive back recruits in this class, with two likely to end up at cornerback and the other three at one of the safety spots. One player certain to play corner is junior college transfer Andre Jones, perhaps the top overall defensive back in the junior college ranks last year. Jones will compete immediately for a starting position in the Husker secondary.

Four high school defensive backs

were also signed in the class — California prospects Ricky Thenarse, Major Culbert and Anthony West, and Omaha (Millard North) standout Corey Young.

Thenarse, Culbert and West will all probably get a first look at cornerback, with the player showing the best man coverage skills and athletic ability staying there and the other two moving to safety. All are physical and could easily play safety.

Young, however, was specifically recruited to play one of the safety positions but will redshirt the 2006 season while he rehabs from ACL reconstruction surgery and regains strength in his knee.

Overall, Nebraska's core needs were addressed in the 2006 recruiting class. Despite the loss of safety Ashlee Palmer on signing day and the inability to add an additional defensive tackle, the Huskers did a generally outstanding job of satisfying their recruiting objectives through a mix of high school and junior college athletes. ■

For more daily recruiting information, visit huskersillustrated.com, a member of the Rivals.com network.

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One Speed

There was no such thing as 'just' a drill for ex-Husker Hagge

By Mike Babcock

Mark Hagge set the parameters during a practice early in the spring of 1986.

He was a freshman walk-on, newly arrived on campus, his enrollment delayed for a semester while he recovered from injuries sustained when he flipped a three-wheeler on his family's farm.

(His family raised thoroughbreds.)

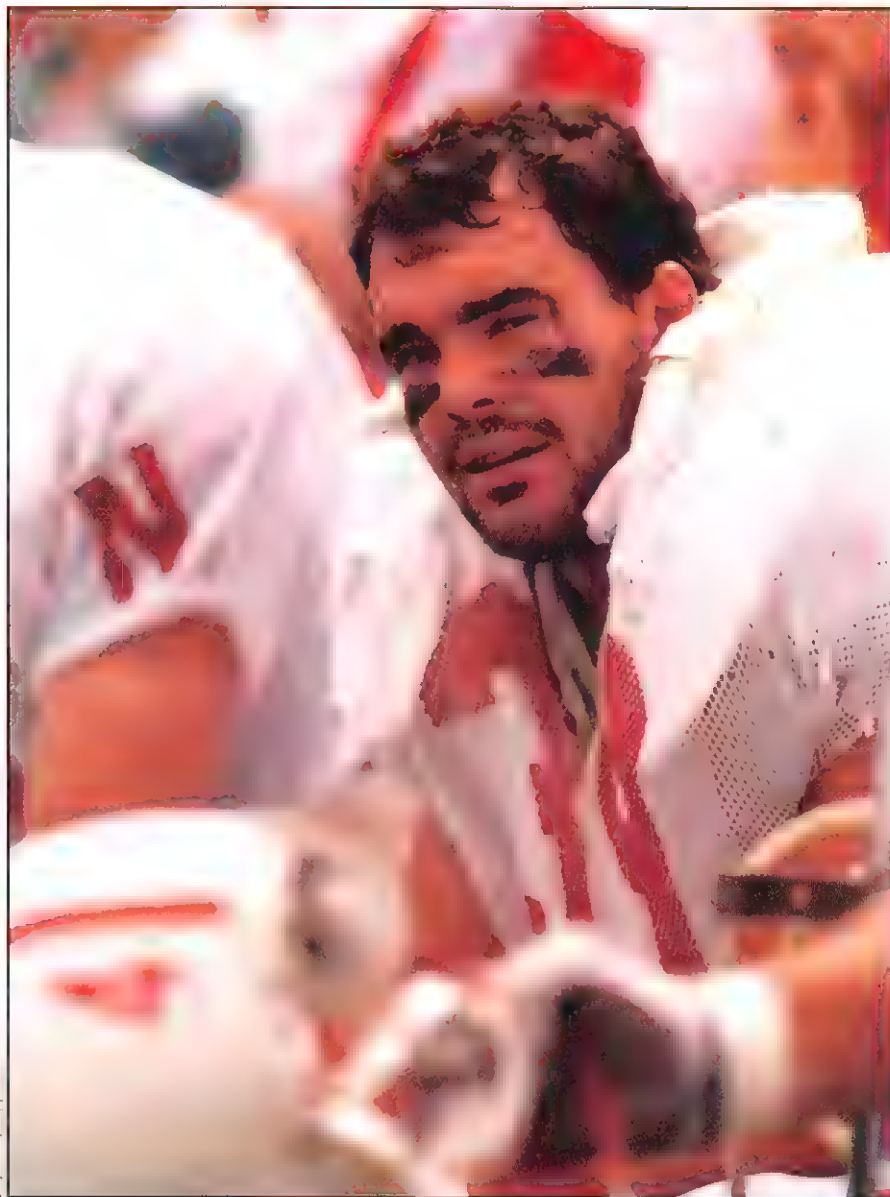
Hagge, a linebacker, was matched against a veteran fullback in a one-on-one drill, and before their turn to knock heads came, the fullback — "who shall remain nameless" — suggested that Hagge slow down, take it easy, because he (the fullback) was being filmed. And after all, it was just a drill.

There was no such thing as "just" a drill for Hagge, however. "I proceeded to tell him, in no uncertain terms, that I was going to be on film, too, and that he'd better be strapped on and ready."

On a football field, Hagge had only one speed — full.

"I just enjoyed playing the game with that edge, a spirit, an unyielding, unbreakable spirit. My attitude was, I wanted to impose my will on the opponent, both physically and mentally," he said. "And I did that during practice because we were competing against each other to be the best every day."

Twenty years have passed since that first spring at Nebraska. But



Mark Hagge earned letters in 1988 and 1989 as a backup linebacker and a key contributor on special teams.

Hagge's enthusiasm for the game hasn't diminished. The only difference is, instead of playing football, he's teaching it.

He is the coach at Valentine (Neb.) High School, passing on what he learned under those who coached him, including Tom Jaworski at Creighton Prep and Tom Osborne at Nebraska.

"I'm not getting rich financially.

But we've helped develop a lot of young men, and I'd like to think I'm making a difference in our young people's lives," said Hagge.

"The life lessons, to be quite honest, are more important to these young men than the football knowledge I'm going to pour into them because I've yet to produce an NFL player."

If attitude alone could get a player

to the NFL, Hagge could have gone there. But at 5-foot-11 and 230 pounds, he was small for a linebacker, and he didn't have exceptional speed.

What he did have was a passion to play at Nebraska, which is why he turned down scholarship offers at smaller schools to walk on and was willing to pay his own way all four years.

Even though he worked his way up the depth chart and was a key contributor on special teams, he was never put on scholarship. But "I didn't give it much thought," he said. "I was grateful for the opportunity to get to play for the Nebraska Cornhuskers. I was doing what I wanted to do."

He had always wanted to play for Nebraska, always considered himself a Cornhusker. He went to games with his dad and an uncle. They would park on the other side of the train tracks north of Memorial Stadium and tailgate before games. And when he didn't go, he listened on the radio.

Fewer Nebraska games were televised then, and legendary radio broadcaster Lyell Bremser was an early link to the Cornhuskers, followed by Kent Pavelka and Gary Sadlemyer. Afterward, in backyard football games, Hagge and his friends imagined themselves as those the broadcasters had described, "pretending we were whatever Husker stars there were that day," he said.

He emulated Steve Damkroger, then Mark Daum and Marc Munford. "We didn't have neck rolls, but we'd throw towels back there, pull our shoulder pads (up), just like the big guys," he said.

"When I got to meet a number of those guys, it was quite humbling."

Hagge had a linebacker's mentality, certainly, according to teammate Bill Bobbora, an offensive lineman. His goal was "to get stitches in his face," Bobbora recalled recently.

And the way he remembers it, Hagge achieved his goal when his helmet flew off during a kick return. Bobbora claims the helmet came off because Hagge unfastened the chin-strap. Hagge says otherwise.

Plus, "I don't ever remember putting that (goal) down on paper," he said.

In any case, Nebraska was playing Colorado and he was blocking on a

punt return and a Colorado player against whom he had competed in high school "got underneath my facemask and popped my helmet off," he said. "Instead of giving up on the play I stayed in my lane and got into the wall."

"We had a side return called. The Colorado players started coming into us, and I laced a couple of guys — and ended up getting 12 stitches in my chin on the sideline."

The subject came up during a film session the next week, with Osborne using a pointer to go through the lost-helmet incident frame by frame, according to Bobbora.

"I don't think he believed that was conventional thinking, playing the game without your helmet," Hagge said. "Coach Osborne and I had a great relationship. I know he often wondered what was making me tick because some of the decisions I made and the choices I made weren't always the best."

No one could question his commitment to football and to Nebraska, however.

When he was at Creighton Prep, a priest asked him what he planned to

do with his life. Hagge told the priest he figured he would go into business.

The priest said no, he would be a teacher.

"I just kind of sloughed him off, didn't think much of it," said Hagge.


A year after he finished at Nebraska, however, he took the first step down that path, serving as a volunteer assistant coach for Jaworski at Creighton Prep. In 1994, with a recommendation from Osborne, he was hired as head football coach at Superior (Neb.) High. And he went to Valentine in 1998.

He and wife Dahn, "my rock," have four daughters: Malori (14), Melani (12), Molli (8) and Madi (5).

His Cornhusker letter jacket is "tucked away," but he occasionally pulls it out and puts it on, "just for the fun of it." The jacket is "a little tight these days," he said.

His Cornhusker pride still fits perfectly, though. "When I travel somewhere, I let everybody know I'm a Nebraska Cornhusker," Hagge said. "That's important. One thing I just really want to emphasize is, it was the time of my life getting to play football for the University of Nebraska." ■

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BASKETBALL

WOMEN'S RESULTS

Overall: 12-9/Big 12: 4-6

Nov. 19 South Dakota State, L 68-49
 Nov. 21 Creighton, W 84-50
 Nov. 25 *LSU, L 74-55
 Nov. 27 *TAMU-Corp. Christi, W 76-64
 Dec. 3 @Minnesota, L 78-70
 Dec. 7 Texas Southern, W 93-68
 Dec. 10 @Northwestern, W 80-50
 Dec. 17 @Michigan, W 69-49
 Dec. 20 Texas State, W 96-47
 Dec. 29 Grambling State, W 69-40
 Dec. 31 Northern Arizona, W 70-56
 Jan. 4 @Colorado, W 80-62
 Jan. 7 Kansas, W 73-61
 Jan. 11 Missouri, L 64-58
 Jan. 14 @Iowa State, L 79-57
 Jan. 18 Texas, L 70-62
 Jan. 21 @Texas Tech, L 61-59
 Jan. 28 Colorado, W 70-54
 Feb. 1 Iowa State, W 54-42
 Feb. 4 @Kansas State, L 71-64
 Feb. 8 @Baylor, L 91-69
 Feb. 11 Texas A&M (FSN)
 Feb. 15 @Kansas
 Feb. 18 Kansas State
 Feb. 21 Oklahoma State
 Feb. 26 @Oklahoma (ESPN2)
 March 1 @Missouri
 Mar. 7-11 @Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas
 *Miami Thanksgiving Classic, Miami, Fla.



Danielle Page (left) and TK LaFleur surround an Iowa State player in NU's Feb. 1 victory.

MEN'S RESULTS

Overall: 15-7/Big 12: 5-4

Nov. 18 *Longwood, W 80-65
 Nov. 19 *Yale, W 73-64
 Nov. 20 *Louisiana Tech, W 59-56
 Nov. 27 SE Missouri State, W 69-54
 Nov. 30 Marquette, W 84-74
 Dec. 3 Ala.-Birmingham, L 73-72
 Dec. 8 South Dakota State, W 76-67
 Dec. 11 @Creighton, L 70-44
 Dec. 17 Chicago State, W 76-65
 Dec. 19 North Carolina A&T, W 107-57
 Dec. 21 Alabama A&M, W 67-60
 Dec. 31 **Florida State, L 74-60
 Jan. 3 Northern Colorado, W 60-50
 Jan. 7 Oklahoma, W 59-58
 Jan. 11 @Kansas State, W 57-42
 Jan. 17 Iowa State, L 88-75
 Jan. 21 @Kansas, L 96-54
 Jan. 25 @Colorado, L 81-59
 Jan. 28 Missouri, W 65-52
 Jan. 31 @Oklahoma State, W 59-57
 Feb. 4 Baylor, W 60-45
 Feb. 8 Kansas, L 69-48
 Feb. 11 @Texas (ESPN)
 Feb. 15 @Iowa State (FSN)
 Feb. 18 Texas Tech (ESPN+)
 Feb. 22 Colorado
 Feb. 25 @Texas A&M (ESPN+)
 March 1 Kansas State (FSN)
 March 5 @Missouri (ESPN+)
 Mar. 9-12 @Big 12 Tournament, Dallas, Texas (ERT)
 *John Thompson Classic, Lincoln, Neb.
 **Orange Bowl Classic, Miami, Fla.



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10 QUESTIONS

with
JAMEL WHITE

**6-3/185 Fr. Guard
Brooklyn, N.Y.**

One question didn't make this list: What's the best of New York City's five boroughs?

Jamel White answered before the question was finished. "Brooklyn," he said.

White grew up in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, on the same street as NBA players Stephon Marbury, Sebastian Telfair and Chris Taft, and Rutgers' Quincy Douby. The "Garden," an outdoor basketball court described in Darcy Frey's *The Last Shot*, is located nearby.

White learned the game there, playing "all day, every day," he said. "It's just basketball. I love basketball. Everybody, basically, in New York loves basketball. You're always going to find people who want to work out or who just want to play pick-up games. You're always up to something."

White took his game from Brooklyn's Grady High to prep school, Laurinburg, N.C., Institute, where he adjusted it in preparation to come to Nebraska, which recruited him to play point guard.

"I was always a two-guard, always a shoot-first guy," he said. "So I had to change my mentality to pass first. That whole year of prep school, that's what I tried to work on."

White takes pride in Brooklyn and its basketball, which he considers the best in New York City. His roommate in Schramm Hall, Mike Smith, disagrees. Smith, a redshirt, is from the Bronx.

"We go at it," said White, "(about) who has the best players."

Kobe Bryant, Allen Iverson or Dwyane Wade?

"Kobe Bryant, he just reminds me so much of Michael Jordan. His play is just so spectacular. Not taking anything away from Allen Iverson; he's a great player. He's so small and leading the league in points. Dwyane Wade also is spectacular. But I just love Kobe Bryant."

What's the best thing served at the training table?

"I'd say the cheesesteaks. Man, it just feels like you're in Philly, everything about it. I put a lot of hot sauce on mine."

If someone were to visit New York City and they had never been there, what would you show them first?

"Manhattan, the view. I'd probably take them to Times Square."

What's the most difficult part of adjusting to Lincoln?

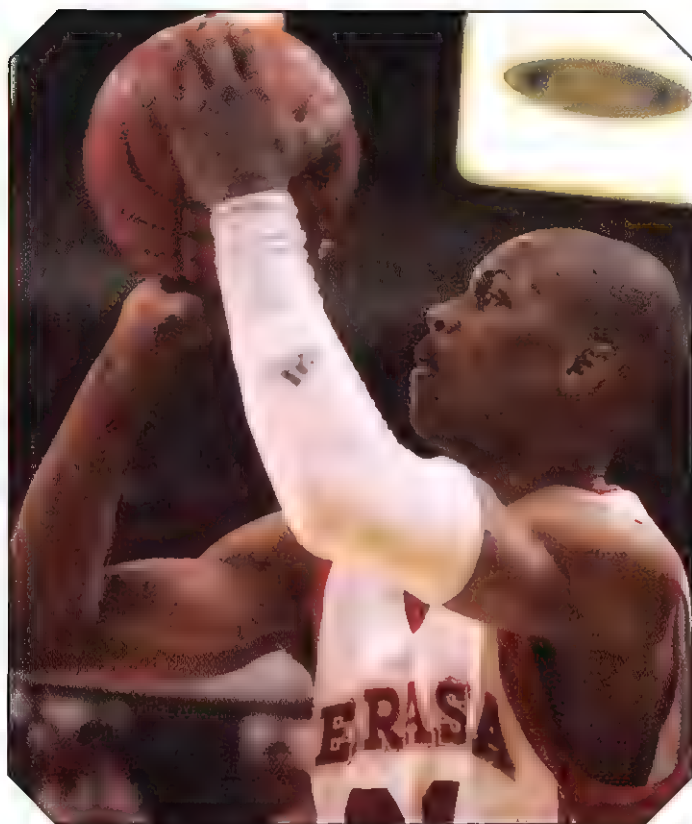
"Just the pace and getting around without a car, not now but at the beginning I had to. I have a girlfriend now. It took me a couple of weeks to meet her. She's from California, Long Beach."

What's the best movie you've ever seen?

"Scarface." I love action movies. It was based on true events."

If you could excel at any sport except basketball, what sport would it be?

"Football, I played quarterback in high school, until my junior year. I got hurt, my (left) knee. I tore ligaments. I'm kind of still suffering from it now. I was an option quarterback, but I had a lot of passing yards, almost broke a lot of records in passing. I was going to try to play both in college. But after the knee injury,



my mom actually told me that was enough (football)."

If you could eat only one thing for the next month, what would it be?

"Lasagna, I just love my mother's lasagna. She makes it good. I could eat it all day, any time. She uses hamburger meat, the noodles, cheese, oh man."

Who's the flashiest dresser on the team when you go on the road?

"Me and Charles (Richardson) . . . Charles because he has more suits. I'll catch him, though."

What do you remember about your recruiting visit to Nebraska?

"Going out to the local restaurants with the team, FireWorks, Famous Dave's, and playing with the guys, having a good chemistry when I came here. I was with Charles (Richardson) and Jason (Dourisseau) during the day and then we all got together at night. I came with Mike Smith, Chris Matthews and Quantez Robertson, who played with me at Laurinburg. We were all together. I played against Mike before we came here in an all-star game in New York. It was a borough game, Bronx versus Brooklyn. We beat them pretty bad. He came to me in the locker room afterward and was like, 'Hey, what's up, man? I'm going to see you at Nebraska.' And I'm looking like, 'Who are you?' I didn't know him at first. I called Coach (Scott) Spinelli and he was explaining everything. I didn't know who he (Smith) was."

Other than family, what do you miss most about Brooklyn?

"Just the lifestyle, you've always got something to do, like hanging out with friends. I have a son back home, too. Jamel (Jr.) He's 2. He'll be 3 in August. It's real tough knowing that he's there and I'm here. I'm going to try to get him out here as many times as possible. Now, I just call him every day and speak to him. He's a husky kid. He likes football. When I speak to him, I'll be like, 'Man, what you doing?' And he'll go, 'Football, football.' He lives with his mom. They have digital cable, (ESPN) Full Court, so he's seen me play. She tells him what to say sometimes, in the background." ■

Young Guns

NU's freshmen wrestlers 'want to dominate people'

By Mike Finn

Call them "Children of the Corn . . . Huskers" because no group of young wrestlers have been more scary to college opponents this winter than Nebraska's young group.

Big Ten powers Iowa and Michigan discovered it first-hand at the NWCA National Duals, Jan. 14-15, when the unseeded Huskers dominated both the No. 5 Hawkeyes and No. 4 Wolverines and eventually finished third in the annual dual meet format.

And leading the way for Nebraska coach Mark Manning that weekend in Cedar Falls were four freshmen who all recorded pins in helping the Huskers upset both Iowa and Michigan. First, it was redshirt freshmen Paul Donahoe and Patrick Aleksanyan at 125 and 133 pounds, respectively, who flattened their Hawkeye foes in the first round of the tournament. Then it was 157-pound redshirt freshman Chris Oliver and 184-pound true freshman Vince Jones who scored falls in the second-round win over Michigan. This also marked the second time this season that the Huskers defeated the Wolverines, who finished second nationally a year ago.

"It's their attitude," said Manning to why his young wrestlers are not only winning, but also pinning their foes this season. "They want to dominate people. We push that a lot in practice, and some guys just have it in them more."

"We work on 'fall' situations in



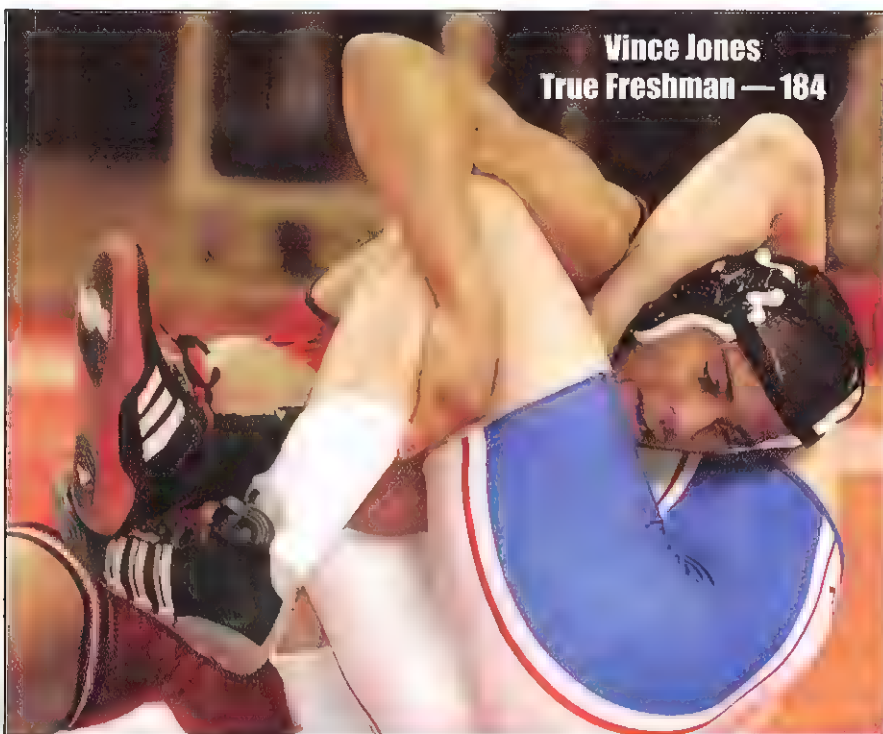
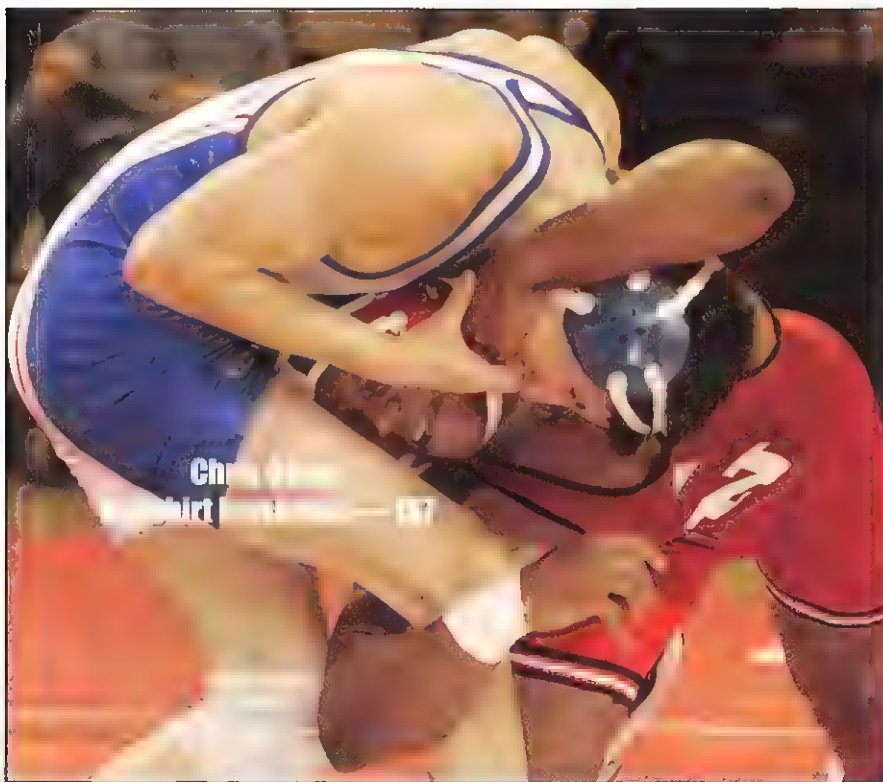
practice," said Oliver, a native of Omaha. "We keep wrestling, and once we get in the situation, we try to take advantage of it."

With the spunk of these freshmen — and just two seniors (174-pound Jacob Klein and 197-pound B.J. Padden) in its lineup — Nebraska has definitely been the surprise team of Div. I. Ranked just 15th before the start of the National Duals, NU rose to No.

3 in the nation even after losing for a second time this year to three-time defending NCAA champion Oklahoma State, in early February.

Manning, who is in his fifth year in Lincoln, is finally getting a chance to see the potential of his young team, but he wasn't ready to put cart in front of the horse.

"We're a work in progress," said Manning. "We have a lot of work to



do."

But Manning, whose 2005 Husker team finished a disappointing 18th place in last March's NCAA Championships, also knew he had a lot of potential in this quartet that had combined to compile a 72-29 record with 30 pins as of Feb. 5.

Donahoe is a native of Davison, Mich., where he was a two-time state champ and a two-time Junior

National champion. Ranked ninth nationally, he was 21-5 with eight falls the first week of February.

Aleksanyan, whose first name is actually Patvakan, was born in Armenia before his family moved to Santa Ana, Calif. After compiling a 161-31 in four years at Calvary Chapel High School, he redshirted last winter at Cal-State Fullerton before transferring to Nebraska, where he won 13 of

his first 25 bouts.

Oliver attended Omaha Creighton Prep, where he not only won four state championships but all 130 of his high school matches. He was 15-5 with five pins and ranked 14th.

And 15th-ranked Jones, who defeated two-time All-American Paul Bradley of Iowa, 4-3, in his first varsity match at the National Duals, may have been the biggest surprise; not only that he broke into the lineup as a true freshman, but that he did not have the most national experience as a prep at Sicklerville, N.J. In fact, neither he nor Manning knew whether Jones would wrestle immediately or redshirt. But that was before the 184-pounder dominated Open competition with 14 pins before the National Duals. As of Feb. 5, Jones was 23-4.

"Once he got in our room in November, he told me, 'Coach, I want to wrestle. I want to be the guy,'" said Manning.

"He's a star on the rise. He's just a fun kid to be around. He didn't come from a wrestling-enriched area, but he has great feel for the sport, and he gets out there and goes after it. He says, 'Why shouldn't I win?' He keeps it pretty simple while other people overthink it."

The energy of these freshmen has apparently had a big impact on the more veteran Huskers.

Klein, who earned All-American honors two years ago, defeated Iowa's Mark Perry, an NCAA runner-up last year, in the National Duals.

And Padden, the 2005 Big 12 champion who finished fifth nationally last March, moved up to No. 2 in the national rankings after recording two wins over Oklahoma State's two-time NCAA champion Jake Rosholt, including the second time by pin on Rosholt's home mat in Stillwater, Okla.

With the NCAAAs just a month away, there is no doubt in Manning's mind that his Huskers are ready to take the more-experienced teams. In fact, he does not think Nebraska's potential is that surprising.

"Not to us," he said. "We have a young team, and we're getting better. I've seen us progress the last three or four weeks. To us, we have a really good team, and our guys really believe in us and what we are doing." ■

Mike Finn is the editor of Wrestling International Newsmagazine. He can be reached at mikel@win-magazine.com

Team Comes First

Sophomore standout Parsons says she's not big on setting personal goals

By Terry Douglass

In a sport that would seemingly glorify individual performances, Nebraska gymnast Emily Parsons is all about team.

Despite an already stellar sophomore season in which Parsons has dominated weekly Big 12 Conference honors, the 5-foot-2 sophomore from St. Charles, Mo., is clearly more concerned about helping the Cornhuskers win a conference title and finish among the top teams in the country.

"It's really exciting for me, and it's a huge honor, but it's something that I don't really think about," said Parsons of her individual accolades, which also include first-team All-America honors and the Big 12 newcomer of the year award last season. "It's special, but I'd rather focus a little more on what we have to do with the team."

Try to ask Parsons about her individual goals, and it all comes back to the team.

"More than anything, I set team goals with the girls," Parsons said. "I'm not really big on setting personal goals because I feel that if I do well for the team, the rest is going to come."

"We want to win the Big 12 as a team. We want to finish top three at nationals, and we want to keep doing what we've been doing and getting better. By the end of the year, we should be right where we want to be if we can do that."

Perhaps Parsons' love for the team atmosphere was



Nebraska sophomore Emily Parsons earned Big 12 Gymnast of the Week honors four times in five weeks.

cemented during her younger days. Prior to her junior year in high school, she trained 30 hours per week — alone. After switching gyms for her junior and senior years, Parsons learned the joys of having teammates and working together for a common goal.

"College is all about the team," Parsons said. "It's not about how good you are; it's how good you can make your team. I think just that sense of camaraderie helps so much with your work ethic because you get so much more accomplished with your team than you can by yourself."

Parsons certainly helped her team on Feb. 4, capturing two individual event titles and the all-around crown to lead a No. 8-ranked Nebraska team to a season-high score 196.85 on its way to a victory over No. 6 Oklahoma. Parsons recorded first-place finishes on beam (9.925) and floor (9.90) en route to the all-around title (39.55) in a performance that also left her in second on vault (9.90) and fourth on bars (9.825).

"If you ever get an opportunity to watch Emily compete, you're pretty much in awe of her dynamics and how dynamic she is with her tumbling and her vaulting," Nebraska coach Dan Kendig said. "Everything she does is just very aggressive."

Parsons has turned out to be exactly the package of tal-

ent and desire that Kendig was certain he was recruiting. With that in mind, her immediate impact has been virtually no surprise to the veteran coach.

"It's hard to predict most of the awards because you don't know what the athletes are going to be doing on the other teams," Kendig said. "But we pretty much felt like that when we signed her, we signed someone who had the power, the energy and just that something special that you find in certain athletes that can really make a difference for your program."

That was evident Parsons' freshman year as she finished third in the floor exercise at the national meet, earning first-team All-America honors. She also earned second-team All-America recognition in the vault, balance beam and the all-around.

Following offseason shoulder surgery, Parsons is feeling even better physically this season. Although she still experiences some pain working on the bars, she said her overall health is much better than it was in 2005.

"I have so much more confidence, and practices have been better," Parsons said. "I think that's the biggest thing that has helped me this year over last year is just focusing every day, making every routine like I'm at a real meet."

Although the bars is admittedly the weakest event for Parsons — and the one she enjoys practicing the least, mostly because of the physical discomfort — she stays with it. Why?

For Parsons, being an all-around standout is more important than merely being good at her favorite events like the floor exercise and the vault.

"I think it's really important because it shows that you're good in all four events and not just one," Parsons said. "It shows that you really pay attention to detail in every event, and it's hard. It's hard to do all-around every weekend or at every meet on your body, so I think that shows that you have that kind of endurance."

With that kind of attitude, Kendig expects big things from Parsons this season.

"She's good enough to be All-American like she was last year on the four events again," said Kendig, who gives Parsons a shot to win national titles in the floor, vault and possibly even the balance beam. "Her bars are a little weak — weak because we haven't had the opportunity to train her there as much."

"We pretty much walk on eggshells just to be able to keep her in

EMILY PARSONS' CAREER BESTS

- **Vault: 9.95** (at Missouri, Jan. 28, 2005; vs. Oklahoma, Feb. 5, 2005; at Iowa State, Feb. 11, 2005; at Super Six Challenge, Jan. 7, 2006; at Utah, Jan. 20, 2006)
- **Bars: 9.85** (vs. Michigan, Jan. 13, 2006)
- **Beam: 9.925** (at Oklahoma, Feb. 4, 2006)
- **Floor: 9.95** (at Arkansas, March 19, 2005; NCAA South Central Regional, April 9, 2005; at NCAA Super Six Finals, April 22, 2005; vs. Michigan, Jan. 13, 2006)
- **All-Around: 39.625** (vs. Michigan, Jan. 13, 2006)

the all-around because she doesn't train that hard on bars. I think if her shoulder ever comes around and gets strong and we get the opportunity to

train on bars, I think that could even be better, too, because of her power and the way she does things."

However, how Parsons ultimately judges her sophomore season will undoubtedly come down to the Huskers' finish as a team.

"We just want to be up there. We want to have that respect at nationals that we're one of the best teams," Parsons said. "We want to be among the top three and we know we can. It's just hard sometimes because people don't always respect Nebraska gymnastics a lot of the time, so we don't get what we deserve a lot of the time and I think that just makes us work even harder to prove we belong." ■

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the Grand Island (Neb.) Independent. He can be reached at terry.douglass@charter.net

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Twists and Turns



Nebraska diver Amie Buoy (above and right) qualified for the NCAA Championships last season as a junior. (Photos by Scott Bruhn)

Husker diver stays positive while recovering from injury

By Todd Henrichs

The twists and turns that Amie Buoy incorporates into her dives are nothing compared to the ups and downs of her four-year career at Nebraska.

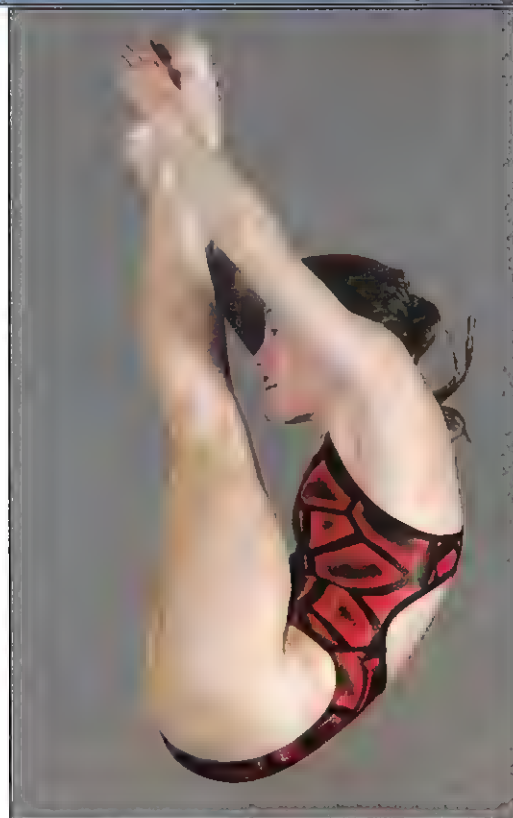
From choppy beginnings — she joined the Huskers at a time when the swimming program was barely afloat — Buoy has worked with three different diving coaches. After just missing qualifying for the NCAA Championships during her freshman and sophomore years, she finally made it as a junior.

Buoy's appearance at the NCAA

Championships last March was a first by an NU diver in 15 years.

"I was really happy, because it was such a big deal," Buoy said. "That's what I really had wanted to do ever since I was a freshman here."

Her performance at the national meet — an 18th-place effort on the 3-meter board and a 27th-place showing on the 1-meter — only heightened Buoy's optimism for this season. She clicked with Natalya Chikina, the program's new diving coach. Two dives in, she was leading the talent-laden field at the Minnesota Invitational in November.



That's when disaster struck.

It was a dive that Buoy had performed hundreds, perhaps thousands, of times. In fact, Chikina says that the confidence that Buoy has in the dive, a reverse 1 1/2 pike, might have played a part in what amounted to a frightful miscalculation.

Buoy misjudged her come-out and smacked the top of her right hand against the top of the unforgiving springboard. She broke a bone in her hand.

"I was in shock at first," Buoy said, describing her reaction while still underwater. "I was like, 'Oh, my god. Oh, my god. What just happened?'"

"They had to help me out of the pool, and then I just sat down by the wall and started bawling."

Buoy had a pin placed in her hand, forcing her to miss almost two months of training. She returned in January, her confidence hurting as much as the pain she still must endure on every dive as her hand cuts into the water.

"She had big goals for this year. She was doing so well. I was very happy with her performance," said Chikina in describing Buoy's

progress prior to the injury. "We're hoping to get better, but we can only take one step at a time."

"It definitely was a step back, but we decided we're not going to give up, and just to try our best."

It's much the same approach that head swimming coach Pablo Morales has taken in rebuilding the NU program. Morales took over in 2001, only months after officials announced they were ending the men's program at Nebraska due to pending NCAA sanctions, as well as gender-equity and budgetary concerns.

Angered by the decision, many of the women left the program, leaving Morales with very little to work with in his first season. Buoy was a member of the first full recruiting class that Morales brought in in 2002.

Looking back, Buoy said she had no idea of what she was getting into. What brought her to Nebraska, she said, was her acquaintance with former NU divers, including fellow Canadian Jerilyn Drummond.

Like Drummond, Buoy, who placed 12th in a world age-group meet held in Germany in 2002, hails from Edmonton, Alberta.

"Just thinking about the last four years, I can't believe what we've been through," Buoy said. "This team has grown so much. We've been through so much together."

Nebraska, which placed last at the Big 12 meet in 2002 and 2003, was third last season behind powerhouses Texas and Texas A&M. Buoy placed second on both the one-meter and three-meter boards at the Big 12 meet.

Before the injury, her goal for this season was to score Nebraska's first points at the NCAA Championships since 2001. Now, she's only hopeful of returning to the national meet.

"I've just tried to do the best I can and keep a positive attitude," said Buoy, who spent a lot of her time out of the water conditioning, exercising and visualizing to prepare for her return.

"But I don't really think I imagined how hard it would be to get back," she added. "It's a little over a month, I guess. You never know what might happen in the end." ■

Todd Henrichs covers the Nebraska swimming and diving team for the *Lincoln Journal Star*. He can be reached at 473-7439 or thenrichs@journalstar.com



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A Look at 2006 . . .

The goal is to win the Big 12 title, as Nebraska did last season. Not setting such a goal would be a mistake, according to coach Mike Anderson. However, "you can't be thinking about the final conference standings when you're about ready to field a ground ball," he said.

"So to get these kids to play in the present is the most important thing."

The Cornhuskers won a school-record 57 games, including their first-ever in the College World Series, with a veteran team led by national player of the year Alex Gordon.

In contrast, Anderson's fourth Nebraska team is three-fourths freshmen and sophomores. Even so, "we have some talented players that have experience," he said.

"But they don't have experience in the specific roles we have them in this year."

For example, sophomore Ryan Wehrle, who earned all-conference honorable mention, is moving from second base to shortstop and batting higher in the order. And there are others.

The Cornhuskers again will be pitching rich, with a staff built around first-team all-conference starters Joba Chamberlain and Johnny Dorn and closer Brett Jensen.

And they have catcher Jeff Christy to handle the pitchers.

Christy is among only four seniors on the roster. "The number of seniors isn't so much of a concern for me as the leadership is," said Anderson. "Hopefully, our leadership is strong."

SLIM AND TRIM

Chamberlain, a preseason All-American, has dropped 20 pounds and 4-percent body fat after posting a 10-2 record with a 2.81 earned-run average and 130 strikeouts in 118.2 innings. "Joba's preparing his body for the long haul and has done a great job with that," Anderson said.

The velocity on Chamberlain's fastball was in the high 90s in January.

"I feel great," the junior right-hander said. "It's nice to look in the mirror and see what hard work does for you. It's not only for myself but it's for my teammates because as the season goes, they can count on me to be there for them, to get them into the seventh and eighth inning."

FULLY RECOVERED

Dorn, a second-team preseason All-American, was

limited during fall practice because of injury. But he's fine now. "There hasn't been one time, from the fall until now, that Johnny didn't look at me and say, 'Coach, I'm 100 percent,'" said Anderson. "I think he's tired of me asking."

Dorn was 12-2 with a 2.16 ERA as a freshman.

MIDDLE OF THE ORDER

Five players figure in the mix to bat in the middle of the order, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth spots: Wehrle, senior Brandon Buckman and juniors Andy Gerch, Luke Gorsett and Andrew Brown. Gorsett and Brown are among the newcomers, junior college transfers. Gerch, an outfielder, will be limited to duty as the designated hitter for the first month of the season coming off shoulder surgery.

FOR STARTERS

Sophomore left-hander Tony Watson is slated to join Chamberlain and Dorn in the rotation when the Cornhuskers open the season at Charleston, S.C. The weekend's fourth starter will be "TBA."

THE ROSTER

INFIELDERS — Andrew Brown, *Brandon Buckman (Sr.), Steve Edlefson (So.), Andrew Gudmunson (Fr.), Nick Jaros (Jr.), Casey Klapperich (RFr.), Jake Mort (Fr.), *Jake Opitz (So.), Matt Wagner (RFr.), *Ryan Wehrle (So.)

OUTFIELDERS — *Andy Gerch (So.), Luke Gorsett (Jr.), John Lee (Fr.), *Bryce Nimmo (So.), Nick Sullivan (Fr.)

CATCHERS — *Jeff Christy (Sr.), *Mark Hightower (So.), Jeff Lanning (Fr.), Jesse Shriner (Jr.)

RIGHT-HANDED PITCHERS — Erik Bird (Fr.), *Bohanan, *Joba Chamberlain (Jr.), *Johnny Dorn (So.), *Matt Foust (So.) *Mike Harmelink, *Brett Jensen (Sr.), Mike Nihsen (Fr.), Tim Radmacher (RFr.), Drew Schwab (RFr.), Charlie Shirek (RFr.), *Dustin Timm (Sr.) *Luke Wertz (So.)

LEFT-HANDED PITCHERS — Jared Cranston (So.), Zach Herr (Fr.), Dan Jennings (Fr.), *Jon Klausung (So.), Tim Scott (Fr.), Wes Simmons (Fr.), *Tony Watson (So.)

*denotes letter-winner

THE SCHEDULE

Feb. 16 — at Charleston (S.C.) Southern; **17** — *North Carolina State at Charleston (S.C.); **18** — *The Citadel at Charleston; **19** — *Richmond at Charleston; **24** — **Texas State at Houston; **25** — **Rice at Houston; **26** — **St. John's at Houston

March 3 — ***Notre Dame at Minneapolis; **4** — ***Arizona at Minneapolis; **5** — ***Minnesota at Minneapolis; **10-12** — Alabama; **14-15** — Illinois State; **17-19** — South Dakota State; **21-22** — Western Illinois; **24-26** — Kansas; **28-29** — Northern Colorado; **31** — at Kansas State

April 1-2 — at Kansas State; **4** — Creighton at Rosenblatt Stadium; **7-9** — at Missouri; **11** — at Iowa; **13-15** — Texas A&M; **18** — Creighton; **21-23** — at Texas; **25** — Wichita State; **28-30** — Texas Tech

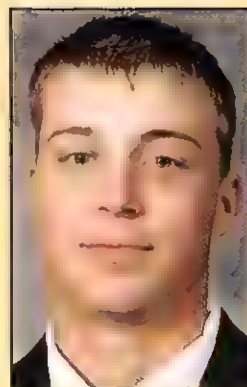
May 5-7 — at Oklahoma State; **10** — Northern Iowa; **12-14** — at Baylor; **16** — Creighton at Rosenblatt Stadium; **19-21** — Oklahoma; **24-28** — at Big 12 Tournament, Oklahoma City

June 2-5 — NCAA regionals; **9-12** — NCAA Super Regionals; **16-26** — College World Series

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Johnny Dorn



Mike Anderson



Joba Chamberlain

SOFTBALL

A Look at 2006 . . .

The Huskers advanced to the NCAA Tournament for an 11th consecutive season in 2005. And they finished with a top 25 national ranking, also for the 11th year in a row.

"It wasn't a bad year," coach Rhonda Revelle said. "But the standards of Nebraska softball have grown to be such that that doesn't feel good enough."

So this year's team is motivated to regain national prominence.

"I think this team is really ready to go," said senior Jessica Yoachim.

"We have some really high expectations that I think we have a great chance of fulfilling, a lot if not all of them."

Revelle has nine returning starters, four of whom have earned All-Big 12 recognition, with which to build. One of the nine is junior pitcher Ashley DeBuhr, who was 24-21 with a 1.84 ERA.

Freshman Molly Hill joins DeBuhr to provide two quality pitchers. And "it's all about pitching in our game; it starts in the circle," Revelle said. "We're very excited about our pitching staff this year. It's really fun for a pitching coach, and a head coach, to think they have that kind of depth."

The two offer contrasting styles. DeBuhr has a "wicked, wicked, wicked curveball, and she changes speeds with the best of them," said Revelle. "When you think of Molly Hill, you think about an establishing-the-inside-part-of-the-plate person, foremost."

"Molly throws a little bit harder. Ashley has a little more movement."

TWO ARE BETTER THAN ONE

Revelle, in her 13th season at Nebraska, compares the DeBuhr-Hill tandem to when the Huskers had both Peaches James and LeAnn Walker, a pair of 20-game winners. She and pitching coach Lori Sippel "are very excited about the possibilities of these two pitchers," Revelle said.

"No. 1, they both have the ability to stretch the zone, to change speeds, to start and finish any of their games. But the thing that's also so great about them is they're great teammates and they could serve as each other's closer just as well. Strategically, we want to mix some things up

"We'll bring in, maybe, Molly to relieve 'Ash' or vice



Rhonda Revelle



Ashley DeBuhr



Molly Hill

versa."

DeBuhr, who completed 32 of 41 starts last season, welcomes the help.

"I think it's going to be great," she said.

WHO'S ON SECOND?

Yoachim, a two-time, first-time all-conference honoree, has moved from third base to second this season. The position switch hasn't been difficult, however. "I grew up playing middle infield, actually," she said. "Third was a new thing for me when I came to college."

She batted .324 with a team-high 43 runs scored last season. She "makes things happen," said Revelle. "When 'Jess' gets on, she finds a way to score."



Jessica Yoachim

OFF AND RUNNING

The Huskers, who were scheduled to open their season the weekend of Feb. 10-12 at the Kajikawa Classic at Tempe, Ariz., were able to practice outside a lot during the preseason because of unusually mild weather. Practicing "on dirt" instead of an artificial surface indoors "gives our infielders so much more confidence going into the first weekend," Yoachim said. "It gives us a lot of confidence."

THE ROSTER

INFIELDERS — *Devin Porter (Jr.), *Carmen Kier (Jr.), *Jessica Yoachim (Sr.), Crystal Carwile (Fr.), Kimberly Fuller (Fr.)

OUTFIELDERS — Meghan Mullin (Fr.), Darcy Rutherford (Fr.), *KoKo Tacha (Sr.), *Lizzy Aumua (Sr.), *Trisha Tannahill (Sr.)

CATCHERS — *Jamie Waldecker (Jr.), Brittany Pascale (Fr.), *Katie Linke (Sr.)

RIGHT-HANDED PITCHERS — *Ashley DeBuhr (Jr.), Molly Hill (Fr.), *Jordan Keen (So.), *Jaime Borg (Jr.)

*denotes letter-winner

THE SCHEDULE

Feb. 10 — *Stanford, Oregon at Tempe, Ariz.; **11** — *Cal State Northridge, Utah State at Tempe, Ariz.; **12** — *Nevada at Tempe, Ariz.; **24** — **Illinois, Florida Atlantic at Columbus, Ga.; **25** — **Florida at Columbus, Ga.; **26** — **Bracket play at Columbus, Ga.

March 3 — ***Stephen F. Austin, Notre Dame at Tulsa, Okla.; **4** — ***Kansas, Tulsa at Tulsa, Okla.; **5** — ***Northern Iowa at Tulsa, Okla.; **10** — ****North Carolina, St. John's at Tallahassee, Fla.; **11** — ****Florida A&M at Tallahassee, Fla.; **12** — ****Bracket play at Tallahassee, Fla.; **14** — Northern Colorado (DH); **17** — *****Akron, North Dakota State; **18** — *****North Dakota State, Akron; **19** — *****Akron, North Dakota State; **22** — Drake (DH); **25** — at Texas; **26** — at Texas; **28** — at Creighton; **30** — Northern Iowa

April 1 — Oklahoma; **2** — Oklahoma; **4** — at Kansas; **8** — at Oklahoma State; **9** — at Oklahoma State; **11** — South Dakota State; **12** — South Dakota State; **14** — Baylor; **15** — Baylor; **18** — at Iowa State; **20** — Iowa State; **22** — at Texas Tech; **23** — at Texas Tech; **25** — Creighton; **26** — Kansas; **29** — Texas A&M; **30** — Texas A&M

May 6 — Missouri; **7** — Missouri; **10-13** — Big 12 Championship at Oklahoma City; **May 19-21** — NCAA Regional; **26-28** — NCAA Super Regional

June 1-7 — Women's College World Series at Oklahoma City *Arizona State Tournament; **NFCA Leadoff Classic; ***Tulsa Tournament; ****Florida State Tournament; *****Big Red Tournament ■

Starting Over

Back injury forced Green to almost completely overhaul her vaulting form

By Terry Douglass

As both an elite pole vaulter and as a person, two of Jenny Green's greatest attributes are courage and optimism. In the past 18 months, both traits have been severely taxed.

Until July of 2004, Green's athletic career was storybook quality. The Nebraska redshirt sophomore from Grand Island Central Catholic won four consecutive all-class gold medals in pole vault at the state high school championships and continued her success in college.

Green quickly became a star with the Cornhuskers, winning both the Big 12 Conference indoor and outdoor titles in the pole vault her freshman year in 2004. She was also third at the indoor and outdoor NCAA championships and owned the Big 12 record by clearing 13 feet, 11 1/4 inches.

That high level of success earned Green an opportunity to compete in the Junior World Championships in Italy, but that's where the script went awry. Green's poles had been lost en route to the meet and while using a borrowed pole, she misfired on her final warm-up run and slammed to the ground outside of the padded landing area of the pole vault pit.

Green's chance to compete for her country was dashed. Worse yet, medical examinations revealed that not only had she injured muscles in her back, but more significant damage had already occurred long before her fall.

JENNY GREEN **SOPHOMORE POLE VAULTER**

It seems that while Green was winning gold medals and setting records, she was also dealing with pain in her back that had been an almost constant companion for several years. As the result of her running style and vaulting style, Green had placed strain on her back that caused stress fractures and eventually produced two breaks in her L2 vertebrae — breaks that ironically occurred the same day she made her Big 12 record vault at the Texas Relays.

As a result, Green was forced to wear a back brace for four months. Even more bothersome was that she had to take the year off from pole vaulting. Green used the time away to heal — and also to contemplate whether or not it might just be time to call it a career.

"That was a possibility," Green said. "I had to weigh a lot of my decisions and see how my year off went. I could've chosen to quit track and just focus on other aspects of my life, but really, I just missed the competition."

Green became keenly aware of that fact last season when her roommates — fellow members of the Nebraska track and field team — would be gone for the weekend at meets, leaving Green home alone with her thoughts. Her plans to try and come back were finally cemented while watching her Husker teammates compete in last year's NCAA indoor nationals.

"I was watching everybody, knowing that I wanted to be out there," Green said. "I knew that was where I belonged."

Green's decision was made knowing that the process was going to be much more difficult than simply deciding to try again. With the help of her coaches and medical staff, she laid out a plan for rehab that included treatment as well as an almost complete overhaul of her pole vaulting form.



Back pain is also a factor as her vertebrate break isn't something that will heal; she just can't injure it any worse. Some days, Green is too stiff to practice and instead opts for treatment.

"It has definitely been more of a challenge than what I expected — just the whole process with my injury and the recovery," Green said. "It's probably one of the hardest things I've done physically and mentally."

By learning a new, more fundamentally sound technique, Green has been able to limit the hyper-extension to her back, which had been putting too much stress on her spine. Essentially, she had to start from scratch.

In an odd way, Green said her injury might have been a bit of a blessing. She said she likely needed to change her form in order to go higher, but that she probably wouldn't have had time to make the change had she been able to continue competing.

"I couldn't do anything for a whole year vault-wise, but at the same time, it was kind of an ideal situation where I could work on multiple reps of the small stuff," said Green, who returned to the Huskers for the indoor season after a 17-month break from competition. "The new way feels pretty natural right now. There are still some

things I'm working on, but for the most part, the time off has really been helpful in that respect."

Nebraska pole vault coach Kris Grimes said much of his work with Green has focused on encouragement.

"Jenny is one of the most competitive, determined individuals that I know," Grimes said. "She also is probably her most ardent critic — she's hard on herself whether it's maintaining her level in the classroom, how she warms up for a day or even how she ties her shoes. Everything has to be perfect, so I feel like one of my biggest jobs is to help Jenny not be too hard on herself and to help her be patient."

Not easy for a classic Type A personality like Green. Although her season-best vault of 12-11 1/2 (as of Feb. 4) is good enough for a NCAA provisional qualifying mark, it's still nearly a foot below her career best performance.

Green said it's frustrating because she knows her form is better than ever, even if her results haven't measured up. However, Grimes said he has the utmost confidence that Green can return to her old performance levels.

"She will," Grimes said, flatly.

Why so confident?

"When athletes come to me and ask

me how they're going to do or what they should set as their goal, my first question to them is, 'What are you willing to sacrifice? What are you willing to do to achieve the goals?' " Grimes said. "With Jenny Green, she's willing to do whatever it takes. The only question mark is health, and I think she has proven she can manage it. Her determination is extraordinary and she will be back."

And even if she doesn't soar to new heights, Green said she's already accomplished a couple of her post-injury goals: getting over a bar again in competition and helping the Huskers win meets.

"I have the new technique, which is what I was missing before," Green said. "Now, if I can get my speed back and my inversion that I had my freshman year — if I can put it all together — I think I can get back to where I was."

"If not, it was great to put on a uniform again. As long as I can contribute to the team and get the team points and help out, I'll keep doing it. I'm just thrilled for the opportunity to be able to vault again." ■

Terry Douglass is the sports editor of the *Grand Island (Neb.) Independent*. He can be reached at terry.douglass@charter.net

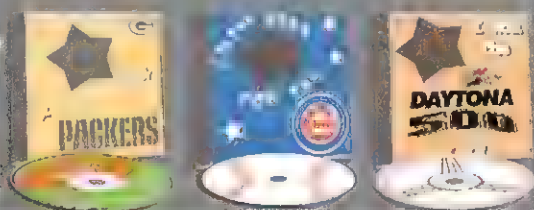
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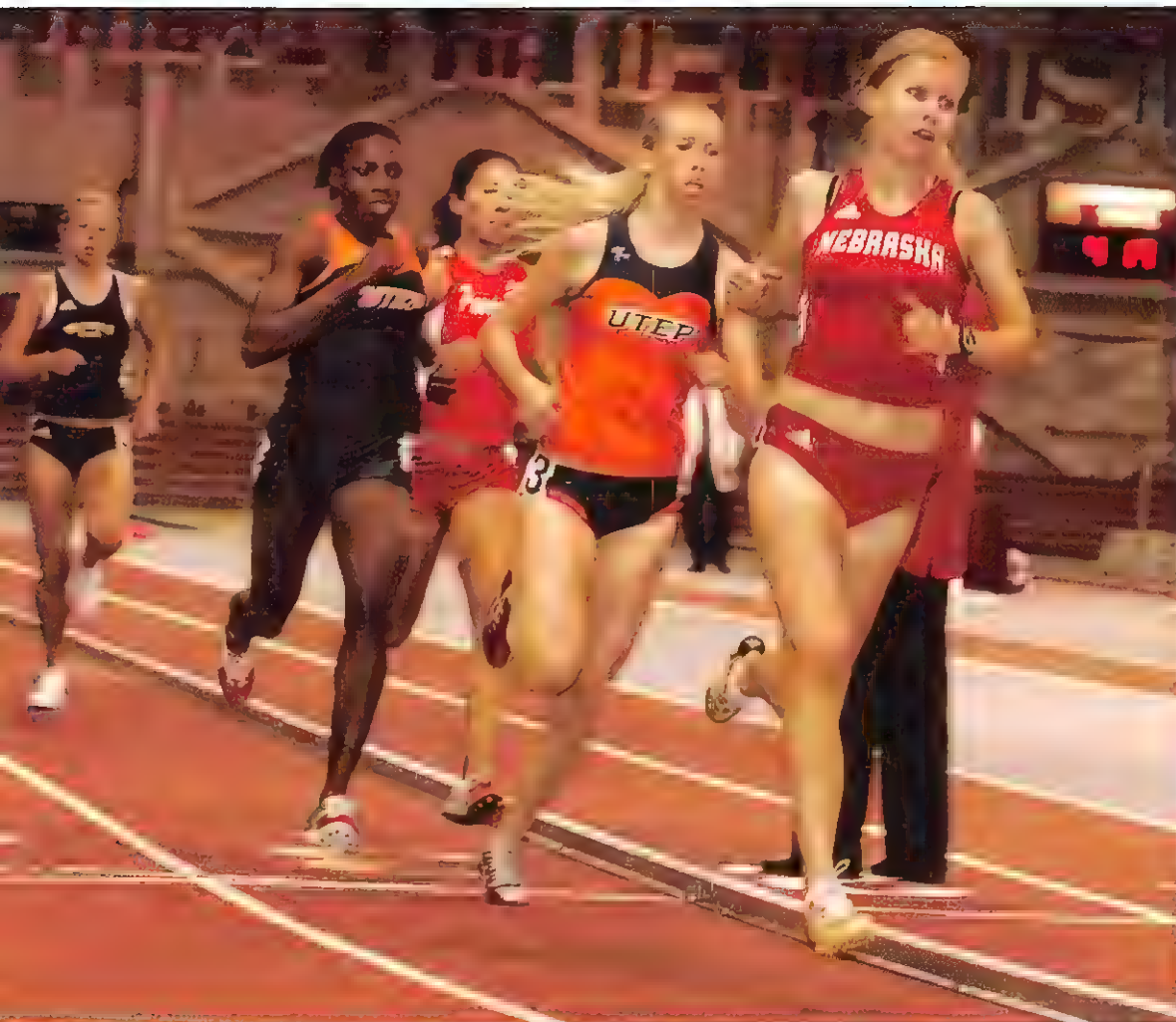
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TRACK/FIELD



Nebraska athletes had a successful weekend in the 31st annual Frank Sevigne Husker Invitational Feb. 3-4 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center indoor track. In the men's 60-meter hurdles, senior Courtney Jones (above) won his second straight meet title with an NCAA provisional-qualifying time of 7.91. Leading the way for the Husker women was sophomore Egle Uljas (left), whose 800-meter time of 2:05.30 shattered Lisa Darley Graham's school record of 2:06.93 (1991) and the Devaney Center mark shared by North Carolina's Alice Schmidt and Colorado's Mary Decker. Uljas, a native of Tallinn, Estonia, also claimed a new Estonia national record during her first 800-meter race of the season. Nebraska's Dmitrijs Milkevics, a junior from Riga, Latvia, set a meet record in the men's 800 (1:48.13).

CROSSWORD

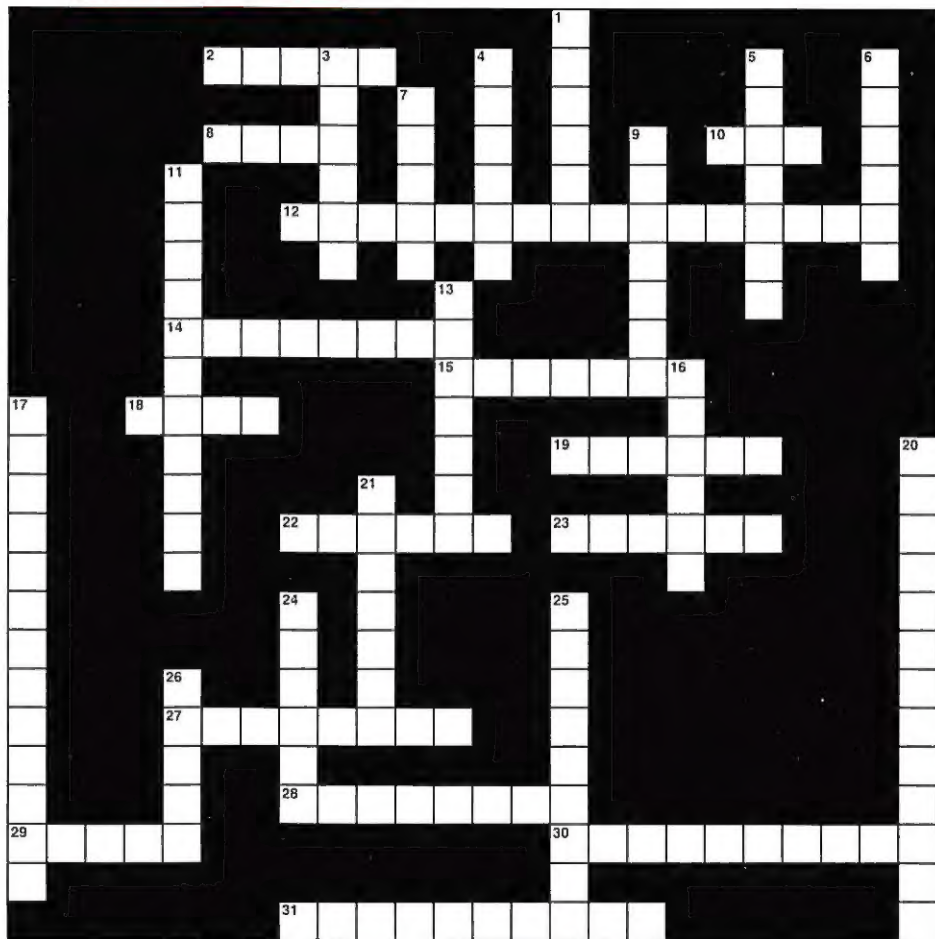
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- 8 Wide receiver recruit from San Diego
- 10 Nonconference road opponent
- 12 Scott Downing's new school
- 14 Recovered 2 muffed punts in Senior Bowl
- 15 Baseball pitching coach
- 18 Sept. 23 opponent
- 19 Guard dismissed from basketball team
- 22 Linebacker leaving football team
- 23 Wide receiver recruit from City College of San Francisco
- 27 Zac Taylor's home state
- 28 Baseball head coach
- 29 2005 national champion
- 30 April 15 event
- 31 State providing most members of 2006 recruiting class

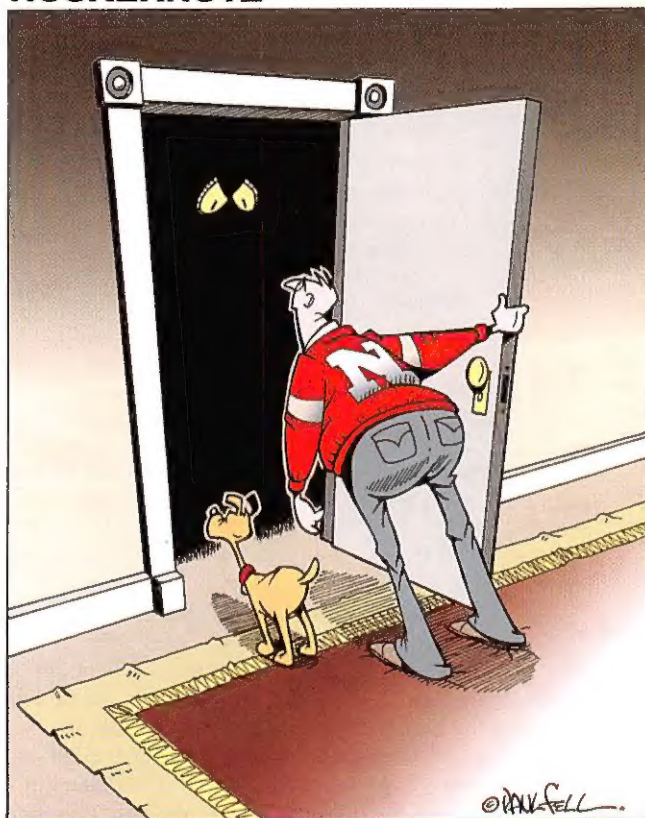
DOWN

- 1 Tight end who missed 2005 season
- 3 New tight ends coach
- 4 Kicker leaving football team
- 5 Ex-Husker defensive lineman in Super Bowl XL
- 6 Only running back recruit in '06 class
- 7 Defensive end recruit from Las Vegas
- 9 Harrison Beck's home state
- 11 Preseason All-America pitcher
- 13 Candidate for governor of Nebraska
- 16 Defensive end recruit from Lincoln
- 17 Sept. 9 opponent
- 20 Opponent in 2006 opener
- 21 Turner Gill's new school
- 24 Opponent in 2007 opener
- 25 Basketball leading scorer
- 26 5-star defensive back recruit

Answers in April issue



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FEBRUARY CROSSWORD SOLUTION



Walk-Ons Welcome

Callahan says NU coaches 'want to extend ourselves to the state of Nebraska, embrace the walk-ons here'



**Mike
BABCOCK**

A TELEVISION REPORTER hustled to set up a camera in preparation for the news conference to announce the Nebraska football team's 2006 recruiting class on letter-of-intent-signing day.

Coach Bill Callahan had already settled in at the front of the room.

"We'll wait on you," he said with a laugh. "We're a little early today."

The embarrassed reporter fumbled with the camera and told Callahan to go ahead.

"That's OK. It's your world. We're just living in it," Callahan said.

He chuckled. "You just let us know when you're ready," he said.

When the camera was finally in place, he began.

Mostly, the news conference wasn't anything out of the ordinary. Callahan acknowledged those involved in the process, underscoring the need for a team effort, and praised the recruits, each of whom is a potential All-American at this point, limited only by one's imagination. For all but two mid-term enrollees, who will participate in spring practice, reality won't set in until training camp in the late summer.

Predictably enough, the Cornhuskers were able to meet their needs, according to Callahan. And "this class serves as an excellent follow-up class to last year's recruiting," he added.

This year's class, like last year's, is heavy in players from California — eight this year and seven last year — and junior college transfers, a reflection of the continuing need for immediate help.

But for those concerned that Callahan might ignore in-state players and fail to understand their importance to the program, the news conference provided evidence to the contrary.

That evidence was embodied in a large map of Nebraska, color-coded to indicate the areas of the state for which each assistant coach is now responsible. In-state recruiting will have "increased importance," Callahan said, launching into what was, in effect, a public service announcement.

"For a young man that wants to come to Nebraska, it's important that the state (high school) coaches connect with our staff and connect with our ability to recruit them (their players)."

Every inch of the state will be covered, from Omaha to Scottsbluff, McCook to Valentine.

In two years' time, Callahan has gone from being criticized for not understanding Nebraska's walk-on tradition to embracing it with the attention to detail that has characterized his game preparation.

The Cornhuskers finished with big victories against Colorado and Michigan as a result of that preparation. Callahan clearly out-coached both Gary Barnett and Lloyd Carr.

Callahan has adapted. He has learned from his mistakes,

including an ill-advised attempt early on to limit the number of players allowed on the field during warm-ups at home games.

"A lot of times a walk-on player will get lost in the mix," he said.

NCAA rules allow only one contact if a potential walk-on is eligible for any type of financial aid. As a result, "it becomes difficult to contact that player on several occasions," said Callahan.

And if a walk-on receives financial aid — such as an academic scholarship — and plays, he counts against Nebraska's scholarship maximum of 85. For example, wide receiver Todd Peterson, a walk-on from Grand Island (Neb.) Central Catholic, counted in this year's total, Callahan said.

"We want to extend ourselves to the state of Nebraska, embrace the walk-ons here. I want the walk-ons here . . . to understand completely and thoroughly that we do want you here."

The Cornhuskers' Alamo Bowl media guide listed nearly 50 players who came as walk-ons, including position starters Brandon Koch, Blake Tiedtke and Adam Ickes, as well as several key contributors on special teams, among them Sam Koch, Lane Kelly and Brandon Rigoni, a Callahan favorite.

In addition, the recruiting-list release included four "preferred" in-state walk-ons: Alex Henery, a punter from Omaha (Burke High); Justin Makovicka, a fullback from Brainard (East Butler); Kyle Moore, a linebacker from Elkhorn; and Dreu Young, a tight end from Cozad.

Makovicka's brothers, Jeff and Joel, both walked on at Nebraska and earned scholarships. Moore is the brother of Cornhusker defensive end Jay Moore. The four walk-ons could be included in

the release because they have been accepted for admission to the university.

"Again, I want to make it a big point, a major emphasis, that walk-ons are invited, especially with the move into the new facility; there is substantial room that we can fit more players into it to be a part of the team. And we would welcome that," Callahan said.

"I hope all the coaches and the players and the fans understand that one specific point."

Those words are being backed up with actions. Callahan had already begun visiting the state's high schools. "They were great," he said. "It was good to get out. I like being on the road. I love going on the road, visiting with coaches and players and seeing different programs, talking with guys."

One of his stops was to visit coach Fred Petitto at Millard North. It was a "great afternoon, watching his team work out," Callahan said. "There were 160 players, I believe, in that weight room."


He was as enthusiastic as he was relaxed in joking with the television reporter. ■





**A relaxed Bill Callahan
joked with a television
reporter.**

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